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LADY

OF

II.

LAKE.

THE LADY OF LYNDON



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THE LADY OF LYNDON.

VOL. II.

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THE LADY OF LYNDON.

BY

LADY BLAKE,

AUTHOR OF

"CLAUDE," "HELEN'S FIRST LOVE,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

18, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1871.

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250. B. 222

LONDON :
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

THE LADY OF LYNDON.

CHAPTER I.

THE all-important day dawned at last. The eager bustle of preparation began to calm down as evening approached, and the performers were all in a state of anxious and, in some cases, nervous readiness.

The early hour of eight being fixed for the commencement of the play, caused an entire revolution in ordinary arrangements, that was not particularly agreeable to the elderly and non-acting members of the household. Lord Fullerton complained bitterly of a six-o'clock dinner; but, being on the whole a good-natured man, he took comfort in the reflection that everything would be over by the next day, and peace and order restored to his establish-

ment. The one or two friends of his own standing also bore their share of the domestic inconvenience bravely; and as the lady of the Castle was on the theatrical side, and had, in consequence, decreed this early repast, no murmurs were heard amongst her guests.

Mr. Denbigh the elder was generally content to follow where his son led—that son of whom he was as proud as he was fond. He would have been glad to see that matters were getting on between Barry and Edith Hampden; he had indulged in hopes that somehow or other these theatrical times at the Castle might have had that effect. But whatever the juvenile fancy might have been that Bertram Denbigh cherished towards Edith, there was no evidence of any advance as they both grew older. It was perhaps the one thing that Mr. Denbigh desired above all others, to see his son united to a girl of whom he thought so highly, and who was so nearly connected, almost brought up by the woman he had once loved best in the world.

No such desirable result, however, followed.

The theatrical intimacy extended itself throughout the whole of the *corps dramatique*; but Edith played a very insignificant part in either of the pieces represented. Barry himself was great in the entertainment, and he was really possessed of considerable histrionic powers. He was evidently thinking much more of his own acting than of making love. Besides, his was by no means a sentimental part; neither did Edith appear at all with him. Her cousins on one occasion condoled with her that it should be so, supposing both she and Bertram Denbigh might desire it otherwise; but her frank laugh and assurance that her feelings were not at all involved in the matter, changed the whole aspect of affairs in the eyes of the two sisters, and they began to suspect that some of their elders had made a mistake in supposing there was anything between Edith and Barry Denbigh.

From that time Bertram was regarded with more favour by most of the young ladies. The youngest Miss Hervey, who was the best of the lady actresses, treated him with especial con-

sideration, and acted with him, and at him, in a most flattering way. Lady Constance, too, began to turn a little of her attention upon him, and demanded a good deal of his in return. Whilst she considered that Bertram Denbigh was her cousin Edith's property, she would not have taken any trouble to win him away from her; but now he seemed to belong to no one in particular, she thought she should have no objection, should he be so inclined, to attach him to herself.

It is to be feared that Barry Denbigh was blind enough, or ungrateful enough, to be perfectly indifferent, for the time being, to any demonstrations in his favour, or to any manœuvres that might be played off upon him. Lady Constance required a great deal of cramming and prompting to get through the easiest part with tolerable credit; so he inclined far more to Laura Hervey, who was naturally quick, and a practised hand at acting as well. The elder sister, Augusta, was already carrying on a very promising flirtation with another

member of their theatrical party, a young man of good family and fortune, and altogether a desirable *parti*. Laura was not as fortunate as her sister, for Bertram Denbigh proved utterly impracticable as a lover in earnest, though an excellent one in the part he played, in which his avowal of the tender passion met with undeserved ridicule. They, however, acted together with a great deal of spirit, and the sort of "Will-o'-the-wisp" character he assumed in it was not altogether at variance with his real nature.

Clare had asked, and had obtained, leave to join the dinner-tea that Audrey was presiding over in the morning-room that was sacred to her and her sister. As it was strictly a young-lady party, Lady Lyndon had granted her daughter's petition. Constance had declined the tea, and took her accustomed place at the dinner-table as usual. She felt no trepidation as to coming events, and saw no reason why she should be deprived of her dinner. "In fact," she remarked to her neighbour, Barry Denbigh,

"I really think one requires something better than tea to fortify one's nerves on such an occasion."

Barry's reply was highly satisfactory—

"My opinion, Lady Constance, is that you are acting far the most sensible part now in fortifying for that which is to come, and I am very glad your nerves did not prevent your joining us at dinner. That being the case, you are sure to get on afterwards."

"I have no fears," replied Lady Constance, coolly, as she helped herself leisurely to some *entrée* that was being handed round. "I do not intend to trust to my own memory, but have engaged a friend to prompt me, so my mind is quite easy in the meantime."

Before dinner was over, a *contretemps* occurred in an unlooked-for arrival which caused some consternation. Wheels were heard driving up to the door, and then a slight bustle betokening some arrival.

"Why, it's only seven o'clock now—surely people cannot be so stupid as to have mistaken

it for eight, and come an hour too soon?" exclaimed Lady Fullerton, rather annoyed.

"Well, we cannot have them in here, to partake of the débris of the dinner," said her lord, rather in remonstrance to a servant who was opening the door somewhat widely, as if to show the unwelcome guest in.

Danvers, the butler, however, persisted in his hospitable intentions; and whilst the person lingered behind in the hall, apparently taking off wraps, he advanced with a solemn step and air worthy of his vocation, and addressing his lady without changing a muscle of his countenance, said,

"Lord Tudor is just arrived, my lady."

The announcement was closely followed by his lordship himself, who quietly greeted his sister and her husband, and then seated himself by the former, saying,

"I did not expect to find you at dinner. You are rather earlier than usual, I think?"

An explanation followed upon that observa-

tion; and whilst it was in the act of being made, Constance turned to Bertram Denbigh, and said in a low voice—

“How unlucky he should have fixed on this day, of all others, to come!”

“He won’t forbid our play, I hope?” he answered, in a voice as guarded as her own.

But there did not appear to be any particular cause for Lady Constance’s protest against her uncle’s appearance. As far as common observation went, he appeared to take everything that was going on with quiet, easy good-nature, and even interested himself so far as to ask some questions of Bertram Denbigh and the other young men respecting the performance that was to take place that evening.

“And do you make your first appearance on the boards this evening, Constance?” asked Lord Tudor of his niece, with a smile which might have been amiable or not, according to the interpretation of the recipient.

Lady Constance met it with a look of perfect composure, as she replied—

"Yes; and as I find I am to perform before you, I hope I may rely on your support."

"Oh! yes; I will promise to admire. But I suppose we are not to clap or do anything of that kind?"

"I really don't know what the rules and regulations are in these cases. I am quite a novice. It is my first appearance, as you just supposed, in public, and therefore I bespeak your indulgence."

"I have already promised you more—my admiration."

"I fear I shall not deserve as much as that," said Constance, as she rose and followed her mother and the other ladies out of the room; and then flew quickly upstairs to the morning-room to publish the unpleasant fact that their uncle Tudor was come, and would be present at their play.

"So much the better," said Laura Hervey laughing, in all the consciousness of coming triumph. "I am glad to hear of another distinguished spectator—some one that can appre-

ciate our performance, which I fear many of the neighbouring guests who are invited will sadly fail to do."

"I daresay you are pretty safe," returned Audrey; "and you are used to the sort of thing. But I wish he had stayed away till our play was over, for he is the most fastidious, I may say satirical, man in London."

"Well, I daresay his lordship has seen plenty of bad amateur acting before, so we shall not shock him past endurance," said Augusta Hervey, as she settled a refractory portion of the dress she was about to put on. "And I daresay there will be plenty of people to admire us, even if Lord Tudor lacks the good taste to do so."

"Nonsense, Gussy," said her sister. "I shall expect a great triumph this evening, and should be sorry to fail in winning Lord Tudor's approbation."

"He has promised me his admiration," said Constance dryly.

"That's ominous, I fear," replied Audrey. "I

should enjoy seeing him admire anything, or anybody."

It cannot be denied that this unexpected arrival seemed to cast a little damp upon the festivities of the evening. Even Lady Fullerton, who was both fond and proud of her only brother, could not help wishing he had stayed away one day longer; and said to him, as they stood together in the drawing-room, waiting the arrival of the expected guests,

"I fear you will find all this a bore this evening, Ferdinand; but you can have the library all to yourself if you are not disposed to enjoy our theatricals."

"By no means, Isabella. Pray do not think me such a Goth as to imagine I have no taste to enjoy such talent as I expect to see displayed this evening. But this is quite a new sort of thing here, is it not?"

"Yes, quite. I do not know how they came to think of it; but some one was talking about the theatre at Belton Abbey, and had been acting there; and I suppose that originated the

thing. By-the-way, you may have been there ?”

“ Yes ; they do the thing very well, with a sprinkling of professionals. But I should not exactly like my wife or my daughter appearing in character amongst them.”

“ Oh ! yes, you would, if you had one or the other, and the wife or the daughter liked acting. It is really not a bad idea these long dull days, with a large party of young people in the house.”

“ I have no doubt they find some amusement in it. Pray is that handsome woman, who sat by Fullerton, going to appear this evening ?”

“ What ! Lady Lyndon ? It is well she does not hear you ask the question. No, she has stood virtuously aloof from all our wicked works and ways, and kept her pretty daughter out of the scrape too.”

“ Indeed ! That is rather hard on the young lady, if she has the same taste as her friends. But I think I hear an arrival, so I will take my

leave for the present. You will keep me a good place, I hope, to see all that is to be seen."

The first instalment of guests was quickly followed by more, and then they came in rapid succession till the whole party were assembled. After that there was a general adjournment to that part of the house where the theatre was situated, the visitors took their places, and the play began. It was all prettily enough arranged, and very creditable to the managers of the undertaking. The stage was of tolerable dimensions, and well lighted. There was no great variety of scenery, but what there was was good and appropriate. The dresses of the performers were, at all events, perfect. The musical part of the entertainment was also well arranged. But the chief triumphs of the evening rested with the two Miss Herveys, who, being used to similar exhibitions, were quite at home under the concentrated gaze of so many spectators, and went through their parts with ease and spirit. There were two or three others who

were tolerable in their way, and Barry Denbigh's acting won golden opinions. Neither of the Ladies Hampden shone with peculiar lustre on the occasion. Constance was simply very stupid, and required vigorous prompting to get her through her very easy part. Even Audrey's performance, good as it was in private, was a failure when it came to be repeated in public. She found it very difficult to raise her voice and modulate it to the desired pitch; and in spite of her usual self-possession, she did not get through the love-scenes with Sir Vere with the same *aplomb* as when Clare was the only audience.

Whatever Vere Lyndon's incipient talents as an actor might have been, the circumstances were not favourable to their development that evening. He felt so much sympathy with Audrey under her embarrassment, that his attention was diverted from his own part, in his anxiety to help her through hers. Thus he was guilty of often turning his back to the audience, and of speaking in tones suited only to the lady

with whom he was performing. However, having a good memory and a quick comprehension, he got through tolerably, on the whole, and neither he nor Audrey acted much worse than many others of the company; but it was far from being the brilliant success that they had anticipated. There was, however, no lack of admiration expressed, if not felt; and so that part of the entertainment drew to a close.

Amongst those who neither complimented openly, nor condoled aside, was Lady Lyndon. The whole thing was evidently a penance to her from beginning to end. To add to her uneasiness, her daughter, as being a performer in the *tableaux*, did not make one of the spectators, and was therefore removed from her surveillance. But she could not remonstrate or object without making an unpleasant fuss, and drawing more attention upon her daughter and herself than was desirable; so she made up her mind to endure everything as best she could.

There was a large room opening into that converted into the theatre, where people could

promenade between the acts, or retire if weary during the performance. Few people cared to avail themselves of this privilege. No one wished to lose a word of the play, or a glimpse of the actors in it. So it was generally deserted.

Lady Lyndon had secured a place in the theatre near the door which led into this room, and as often as she could, without making herself particular, she retreated thither, pacing up and down to beguile her impatience, and forming stern determinations for the future in her own mind. Upon one of these occasions she found one of the large chairs by the fireside occupied, and recognized the late arrival, Lord Tudor. He looked up as the lady approached, and said,

"This is a pleasant change. The theatre is rather crowded and warm."

"Is it?" she returned, absently. "It is very tiresome; but I think it must soon be over now."

He smiled as he replied, "I hope that is not the general sentiment."

59 Lady Lyndon, then recollecting she was speaking to the brother of her hostess, felt it would be more civil to keep her private opinions in the background, so she replied,

“No, it is only my want of taste in such matters. Everyone seems much pleased with the performance.”

“You have, however, discovered that it really is a failure?”

“I? No, indeed! I am no judge. I have hardly ever been to a play or an opera in my life; and I confess it is not a style of amusement to which I am partial.”

“And like it still less, I daresay, in private life? It is seldom private theatricals answer.”

“I never saw any before; but I suppose this is very good of its kind.”

“Well, it is just good enough not to be amusing; though I suppose it would be wrong to enjoy our pleasure at the expense of our friends. But if I am obliged to see a play, I confess I would rather witness the efforts of a company of trained performers than the crude attempts

of amateur performers. The men are well enough, but I am not an enthusiastic admirer of lady actresses, be they ever so good."

"I think you are quite right," returned Lady Lyndon, with such simple fervour that her companion smiled again, and then said,

"I think Miss Lyndon's name does not appear at all," looking at a programme of the entertainment which lay on the table at his elbow.

Lady Lyndon sighed, then said,

"Not as an actress—for which happily she has no inclination—nor should I permit it if she had—but I have, to my great regret, been persuaded to allow her to appear in one of the *tableaux* at the end of the performance."

Just then Lady Fullerton came into the room, and seeing her brother and Lady Lyndon busily talking, looked at them for a moment with a scrutinising expression of countenance, then advancing, said,

"I am sorry to disturb you, but the *tableaux* have begun; and are really worth looking at. Mildred makes such a lovely Queen of Scots, I

really hardly know her ; and her sisters are the Katherines. I must take you to look at them, Ferdinand ; and I would advise you, Lady Lyndon, to be in time for the ‘Divina Commedia.’”

Then Lady Lyndon rose in haste, for it was the moment she had dreaded all the evening, and yet she would not have missed it for the world. They were just in time to see the pretty group of young sisters, with their boy-brothers as pages, in Queen Mary’s court. Then followed two or three other *tableaux*—they were certainly far the most interesting part of the entertainment. Then there was a strain of wild, unearthly music, and the curtain rose slowly on the exquisite representation of the well-known picture of “Dante and Beatrice.”

There was a general and irrepressible murmur of admiration. Never could that scene from the “Inferno” have found fitter representatives.

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sentation. With her tall, exquisite

and long golden hair, and the wrapt angelic expression of her beautiful face, with the upward gaze of those lovely eyes, was just such a Beatrice as might have inspired in life the deathless love of the great Italian poet, who retained it even after her soul had passed into that mysterious place of captivity where they are represented as meeting.

Nor was Sir Vere less admirable as Dante himself. His deep dark eyes, with the fallow complexion, and the regular cast of features, rigid and awe-struck in their expression, and the sombre garments, contrasting so artistically with the pure white robes of light in which Beatrice is attired, all formed a picture as perfect as human genius could devise, or talent represent. To the same unearthly music the curtain slowly descended over the picture of "Beatrice and Dante," and the performance ended.

"What do you think of that, Ferdinand?" asked his sister. "Was it not worth coming into this room to see?"

"Yes—it was very good. And that is Miss Lyndon?"

"Yes. She is a very beautiful girl, you must allow."

"I will tell you when I see her nearer. If she is as handsome as she looked in that picture, I am ready to admit she is really a beautiful girl."

"Well, I think Clare Lyndon will bear the closest inspection—in fact, that she will gain by it. Now, if you will come with me into the room which is cleared for dancing, I will introduce you."

Lord Tudor, making no objection, they wended their way to the ball-room. They encountered Constance near the entrance, who observed to her uncle,

"I fear you were rather disgusted with our performance. I know mine was a failure, so I fear I cannot claim the admiration you were kind enough to promise before the play began."

"Oh! yes, pray accept *mes hommages* on the occasion—both you and Audrey were even better than I expected."

Constance opened her eyes, and gently shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah! you are quizzing us—well, we must expect it. But I hope you admired the Miss Herveys? Now, really I think they acted wonderfully well."

"Yes, a great deal *too* well for ladies. I was rather glad neither you nor Audrey could face it out as they did; and it is not often that I have seen either of you at a loss, so allow me to congratulate you on your failure as actresses, seeing I admire you both most in your own characters."

"Well, that is quite a new view of the matter; and I am obliged to you for putting it in such an agreeable light."

"Never mind your acting for the present, Constance," said her mother. "I am looking for Clare Lyndon. I daresay she is with her mother. I want to find her, and introduce your uncle."

"I am afraid, then, mamma, you must wait till to-morrow. It is very stupid of Lady Lyn-

don, but she has carried her off—they are both gone to bed.”

“How provoking! Are you sure?”

“Yes; Clare was half fainting after her exhibition, and Lady Lyndon said she was not strong—and indeed she does not look so—so they both went to their rooms.”

CHAPTER II.

THERE was a general expression of disappointment when it was asserted that the "Beatrice" whose appearance was the great success of the evening had vanished—that she would be seen no more. Lady Fullerton was quite angry with Lady Lyndon for having withdrawn her daughter.

"Such nonsense; it is all an excuse about Clare's not being strong enough to join the dance this evening. I really think her mother is about the most ridiculous person it ever fell to my lot to become acquainted with."

"She certainly presents a new and interesting study in the genus maternal, as compared with what one generally encounters; but, after all, neither Lady Lyndon nor her daughter may

be the worse for that," said her brother, to whom the remark happened to be addressed. The ball, however, went on the same, and the young ladies, at least, soon forgot all about Clare's non-appearance. Audrey contented herself with observing to Sir Vere,

"I really think, if you happened to be a Roman Catholic family, your sister would be sent into a nunnery."

Vere Lyndon was too well accustomed to his mother's arbitrary proceedings, in regard to his sister, either to feel or to express any surprise on the occasion; he merely said in answer to Lady Audrey's remark,

"Clare has led such a very different life from that you are used to, that things seem strange to you that are perfectly natural to her."

After a pause in the waltz they were dancing together, Vere was startled by Audrey's recurring to the subject he had dismissed from his mind, and her abrupt question, "And pray, Sir Vere, which sort of life do you give the preference to?"

He smiled as he answered after a moment's thought,

"I have no doubt yours is the pleasantest."

"But you think your sister's is the best."

"No, I did not mean to infer that; and as she has never been allowed the power of choice, she can claim no particular merit. As to this evening, I daresay she would have preferred being here, but my mother thought she had had enough exertion—or gaiety, so I daresay she submitted with a very good grace, and went to bed, like a good child as she is."

"Yes, I really think your sister is the best, sweetest girl I know."

"I am very glad you do," said Sir Vere gratefully; and then the conversation probably might have become a little more interesting had not the dance come suddenly to an end, and Audrey was beset with petitions from various other quarters for dances in perspective.

"Keep one or two for me," whispered Vere, as he relinquished her to the next claimant."

"Which?" demanded Audrey, as her partner to be was speaking to a friend close by.

"Oh, any; suit yourself in any engagements you may like to make; I shall not dance myself, so I shall be always in readiness."

"Well, we shall see; but it is a pity you should be so idle, and not dance any more." And then Lady Audrey went her way, and Vere Lyndon his; but it may be seen that by this time a sort of understanding, of peculiar intimacy, had sprung up between them.

Dancing was not at any time much in Vere Lyndon's way, it was far pleasanter to him to walk about the room and make his own observations on all that was going on, with an occasional chat with any man or woman who might happen to fall in his way.

So the ball went on, and was pronounced a very pleasant one by those young people who had plenty of dancing and the right partners, and a very stupid one by those who had not the same good fortune. And then came the supper, which was a regular sitting down affair

on a very grand scale. It was not the least highly appreciated part of the entertainment, especially as so many of the guests had come from far and dined early. The elders all looked with complacency on the long tables, so beautifully arranged with all that could charm the eye and tempt the palate. The younger part of the assembly also were pleased with an arrangement that, whilst affording the requisite rest and refreshment, was also favourable to a quiet half-hour's uninterrupted flirtation.

"It is so much nicer than a standing up supper," said Lady Constance to Bertram Denbigh, whose services she had secured for the time being; "it is so tiresome having to hold one's plate, and people pushing against you, you can never get anything comfortably."

"Yes, and, worse than the eating part, if you happen to be considered in a detrimental point of view in respect to a nice partner, whom you may have carried off from the maternal vigilance, you are ever liable to be pounced upon, and an end put to your pleasant little tête-à-tête."

"Yes," returned Constance laughing, "that is no doubt one of the many evils attending the system, but I should not think you have suffered much from it yourself."

"Perhaps not," returned Barry, pleased and flattered by the remark; "but I have witnessed some sad examples in the course of my experience, which makes me give a decided preference to this form of entertainment. I could point out to you, Lady Constance, at this present moment, two or three couples enjoying themselves in ease and safety, whilst their proximity is regarded with anything but a favourable eye by the powers that be; but they are unassailable in their present position, and safe to be happy—as long as supper lasts."

"They must wish it to last for ever," replied Constance.

Barry laughed.

"Do you think *it* (the sentiment which makes them happy) could stand such a test?"

Constance replied she did not know, and as her experiences in the world of sentiment were

somewhat limited, as well as her companion's, they did not linger long upon that topic, but speedily returned to those more congenial to them both.

Neither need we linger longer over that supper or on the few dances which followed. They soon came to an end; carriages came round in rapid succession. "The courteous host, the all-approving guests," said their last civil nothings to each other, and took their leave. So the play, and the dance, and the day, and the night too, were all ended, and the Castle left at last in a state of tranquillity.

Nearly all the staying guests left the next day. The Lyndons and the Denbighs were to depart the one following, the Saturday. Their paths lay, however, in different directions, for neither Mr. Denbigh nor his son was returning home at that time. That last day was one of great indecision on Vere Lyndon's part; he vacillated much in his mind on the subject of Audrey Hampden; she gave him every encouragement to try his fate (without much

doubt as to the issue), but he felt hardly assured enough of his own feelings towards her, or of the position he had to offer, to avail himself of the opportunities that were thrown in his way. Clare entered the breakfast-room with her mother that morning, according to her usual custom, and in all the perfection of her fresh morning toilette, which was particularly suited to her style of beauty. And then Lord Tudor had the desired opportunity of seeing whether it realized the expectation which had been raised by her appearance the evening before as "Beatrice." To say the truth, man of the world as he was, and hardly capable, as he supposed, of a sensation either of curiosity or real interest on any subject, he did feel a wish to see Miss Lyndon by the morning light. Perhaps, had she reappeared after her performance in the *tableau* the evening before, that wish would hardly have existed. He happened to be in the breakfast-room when Lady Lyndon and her daughter came in, so he had the full opportunity he desired. Lady Lyndon introduced

her daughter, and then quietly and naturally entered into conversation with a man whose verdict could place the stamp of such fashionable notoriety upon her daughter's looks as would make her the "Belle" of the forthcoming season, and secure her undisputed success in society. No thought of propitiating the great man's favour ever entered the mind of the mother of the beautiful girl, who stood so calmly before him, and answered all he said with such perfect unconscious self-possession.

Clare looked upon Lord Tudor simply as Lady Fullerton's brother, and the middle-aged uncle of her friends. She had quite forgotten, if she had ever heard, their assertion respecting his fastidiousness, and other less amiable qualities. On the contrary, if anyone had asked her opinion respecting Lord Tudor, she would have said, without hesitation, that he seemed pleasant and good-natured. He talked of the ball the night before, and related some little incidents respecting it, which amused

Clare, and made her wish she had been present, but she said with perfect candour,

“I am so little used to anything gay, and was so tired after the play, and the exertion of the *tableau*, that I was not sorry to miss the dance afterwards.”

“You did not think of the number of people you were disappointing, Miss Lyndon; for everyone considered they had a right to a further view of the whole of the *corps dramatique*, and to have the satisfaction of seeing how they looked without their ‘feathers and spangles.’”

“There were plenty to gratify them without me, and I could hardly be looked upon as one of the acting company,” said Clare simply; whilst her mother added,

“I only regret having allowed anything in the shape of an exhibition.” Then, remembering she was talking to one of the family, she added, “But it is a concession to please our friends; and, I daresay, need not to be repeated.”

Clare looked a little uncomfortable at her mother’s speech, but she said nothing; and Lord

Tudor, seeing the gentle look of annoyance, would not say a word, as he might have done, about the pleasure she had given to others, or any little reassuring words he might have spoken to any pretty girl with such good excuse. He could not enter into Lady Lyndon's feeling, but he had no doubt that it was genuine. He saw more both of mother and daughter that day, whether by accident or design could not be discerned. It was an unsettled day; many people were going away, and of those that remained, the greater part were tired, and they missed the pleasant excitement which had kept them so well amused for the last fortnight. Audrey proposed a riding party to refresh them all, thinking it would be as good a way of securing a tête-à-tête with Vere Lyndon as could be devised, and they could easily detach themselves from their companions. Lady Fullerton betook herself to her boudoir till dressing time; and as Clare never rode, her mother desired that she should take a last stroll through the grounds with her. They had not gone far be-

fore they met Lord Tudor, and hearing where they were going, he turned round and said, if they would allow him, he would accompany them in their walk.

When they had proceeded some way they heard a noise of shouting and hollaing in their direction, and soon after two or three dogs came bounding up towards them from a wood hard by, and they were quickly followed by Horace Hampden, who reached them panting and breathless with running.

"I have been hailing you this last ten minutes. I saw you walk past the copse when I was up at Hillyard's place, and thought I could catch you up before you had got half so far."

This was addressed to Clare, by whose side the boy stationed himself.

"Well, you are in time for half our walk," she said with a good-natured smile.

"That is lucky; it is the last walk I shall have with you for—goodness knows how long."

"You must come and see us at Lyndon," said Clare.

"I fear not. I shall be afloat again before another month. You will be seeing Fitz Tempest, I suppose, when you get home?" asked Horace meditatively.

"I don't think we shall before he goes away. I think he is going almost as soon as you."

"Not by a month or more—hark! what's that? I hear something crying!" exclaimed the boy, his attention being diverted by some sound not very far distant. "Surely that is a child crying in the wood?"

"No, I don't think it is," said Lord Tudor, who had slackened his pace to let the two young people come up to him and Lady Lyndon, and now joined in their conversation, adding,

"It is nothing but a hare caught in a wire, somewhere in the wood close by; the poachers, as usual, are at work there."

"The poachers? I think they are!" exclaimed Horace indignantly; "but we shall be too many for them yet."

"Take care they are not too many for you, Horace," said his uncle.

“No fear of that; we are going to have a jolly row with them to-night. I have been talking to Hillyard about the very thing; he has heard a word or two about them; one of their number has peached, so we shall know where to find them, and be down on them when they least expect.”

“I hope you are not going to join the keepers in this poaching affair,” said Clare.

“Why not? It will be much better fun than acting plays.”

“But much more dangerous,” said Clare.

“Danger, indeed! Why, Miss Lyndon, don’t you know that I am an officer in Her Majesty’s service?—though I daresay you think I am nothing but a boy.” And Horace drew himself up, and looked ready to run into any danger that might present itself. Lord Tudor observed, whilst the two ladies kept silent,

“So old Hillyard has been enlisting you in his service to-night; he knows what he is about, and you will talk enough to frighten the poachers out of their beat.”

"I hope I can hold my tongue, Uncle Ferdinand, when it is necessary ; but it was not the old keeper that told me anything about it ; it was the new man they have got under him."

"Oh, I think I have heard something about him—his antecedents, or those of his family, are not very creditable, I believe ; and he is lately returned from a visit to the colonies. Well, what does he propose doing to-night ?"

"I think papa has a good opinion of him, or he would not have taken him as under-keeper, uncle. He is the best shot and the cleverest hand with game or wild creatures of any kind you ever saw."

"Just the sort of fellow to turn a boy's head, and lead him anywhere he pleases."

"Does this man belong to this place ?" asked Lady Lyndon, now joining in the conversation.

"I don't know. I only heard he had been living in Australia—somewhere in the bush, I believe. He is a strong, active fellow, and some of his people lived in this neighbourhood, which induced Lord Fullerton to give him

a trial under old Hillyard, as he is getting rather past his work. From what I have heard, however, I should doubt his being a satisfactory sort of companion to the boys here."

"Do you know any harm of him?—because, if you do, would it not be better to mention it openly to Lord and Lady Fullerton, and then they would be able to judge for themselves how far he is suitable for the situation?" asked Lady Lyndon, in her measured tones.

Lord Tudor laughed.

"I daresay they know more about him than I can possibly do, so I should not think of interfering. I believe he is an extremely active, clever man in his vocation, and a remarkably good-looking fellow as well. All the boys here have the most perfect faith in Woodhouse."

"What did you say the man's name is?" asked the lady.

"They call him Woodhouse, I believe; but it may be only a *nom de guerre*. People who come from Australia are apt to change their patrony-

mics; but if he has an *alias*, I never heard it mentioned."

"Oh!" said Horace, who had been expatiating on the merits of his favourite to Clare—"that is not fair, uncle. Everybody knew the Woodhouse family, I am told, years ago here, and it was for that reason papa took him up; and Hillyard says Miles Woodhouse is as good a man, and as upright a keeper, as ever stepped—at least, that is his opinion, and he must know something about him," added the boy, laughing.

"It is my opinion, then, that he need not have enlisted you in his party to-night."

"No more he did, uncle; he only told me what was likely to come off, and then I said I would go too, and he seemed pleased. As to danger, and such nonsense as that, why, he knows, if there was an engagement at sea, I should not be sent below to be out of danger; and I think helping to take half-a-dozen impudent poachers can't be thought of in the same day."

Lady Lyndon had kept very silent after she

had delivered her caution to her companion, and seemed to be pondering the matter over in her own mind. She was, in fact, so absent, that, when Lord Tudor next addressed her, she quite started, and only said,

“We have been out a long time. I think it must be time to go home.”

“Yes, mamma,” said Clare. “Don’t you see we are close to the Castle? This little gate leads on to the lawn?”

“I had forgotten, and I am rather tired; so come, Clare, we will go upstairs at once,” and the mother and daughter parted with their walking companions as soon as they entered the house.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Lady Lyndon reached her own room, she took off her walking things, and then sat down on one side of the fire, at which she gazed for a considerable time without speaking, or taking any notice of Clare, who had come in from her own room, and taken up a standing position on the hearth opposite to her mother. A slight noise she made in taking a screen from the mantelshelf caused Lady Lyndon to start from her reverie and look up, as if for the first time observing her daughter.

“Do you want me, mamma?” Clare asked gently, as she met her mother’s gaze, adding, “because, if you do not, I should like to go and sit a little while with Audrey and Constance in

their room, as we shall be going away to-morrow."

"Yes, you may go, but don't be late for dressing. I wish your hair to be arranged in the new way, and it is so long and thick, it will take Morris some time to plait, so come back a little before the bell rings."

Clare promised with all the docility of a child, and then went her way. After she was gone, her mother sat a little longer; then, rising up, and following the bent of her own thoughts, she left the room, and walked through the lighted corridors to the further end of the house, where the school-rooms were situated. There were two generally in use; in one the children took their meals and studied in part, and in the other received instructions in music and dancing, and other active branches of education. Lady Lyndon knew that at that hour she should find Miss Ainslie alone in her own room just after tea, whilst the three girls would be with the Italian governess in the adjoining apartment.

Lady Lyndon found Miss Ainslie just as she expected, still occupying her accustomed place by the tea-table ; but they had been a little later that evening, so, though the two younger girls, Evelyn and Laura, were already in the music-room (as they called it), Lady Mildred was still busy at a distant book-case, putting away and sorting some volumes that she had been using. She looked up with a pleasant smile of welcome when Lady Lyndon entered, for she was a favourite with the school-room party, and Mildred was enthusiastic in her admiration of the classical beauty of Lady Lyndon's form and features.

"I am come to have a little farewell chat with you, Miss Ainslie," said her visitor, taking the easy-chair Mildred rolled forward to the fire, with a nod of acknowledgment, whilst the girl returned to her occupation, and Miss Ainslie expressed her pleasure at Lady Lyndon's coming.

They sat for a little time, talking on general subjects ; and then the conversation languished. Perhaps Lady Lyndon expected Mildred

to join her sisters in the next room. At last she said,

"Horace has been walking with us, as well as his uncle, Lord Tudor, and he tells us he is going out on active service to-night against the poachers."

"I hope he won't get into mischief," said Miss Ainslie. "But of course he considers himself an independent personage now, and would resent anything that savoured of petticoat interference or government; but there is a new keeper here, who is a very daring sort of fellow, and the boys here—old and young—would follow anywhere he chooses to lead."

"Tell me something about this—this man. Lord Tudor did not mention him in very favourable terms, and I should be sorry if such a fine boy as Horace got into any scrape that might be avoided by a timely word."

"Don't distress yourself about him, dear Lady Lyndon," said the governess, with a half smile, knowing the entirely independent sentiments of the boy in question. "Horace will go his own

way, and I daresay will take no harm. As for this new keeper, he only came about a year ago. Lord Fullerton took him on the recommendation of a friend, who had known something of him in Australia, from which country the man was just returned."

"Lord Tudor said something about disgraceful family antecedents."

"I heard something, but I know nothing for certain, that this man's family lived in a town near here—Middleborough, the place we went to the other day. You said you had heard of it before, and the old inn we drove past."

"Yes, I have," returned the lady, in a low voice.

"Well, this man—Woodhouse is the name—had a father, I think, who was a clerk or manager at Middleborough, and got into some scrape—of what nature I do not know, but it was connected with a club and savings-bank, in some distant town in the country; and people were divided as to his guilt—some said he was innocent, and some thought otherwise. He

went for trial, and was, they say, condemned. I believe the old man died abroad."

"Is that Miles Woodhouse you are talking about, Miss Ainslie?" exclaimed Mildred, who had lingered over her task, and now came up to the fireplace. "Oh! Lady Lyndon, there is such a romantic history about him. I wonder you never heard of it before."

"I did not know your keeper was such an interesting character," returned Lady Lyndon, behind the screen with which she was shielding her delicate cheek from the fire.

"Oh! yes, the boys tell us such strange tales which he has told them; and they say he has the most wonderful skill in taming horses, quite as great as a man we heard of some time ago. I read all about it. He has been all over the world, I believe. First he lived in America, and was a great deal amongst the wild Indians there. I believe his wife was an Indian; and then his home was broken up by a hostile tribe coming and murdering his wife and children, whilst he was out on the war-path, as he called it.

The man might write a story of his life."

"Now, my dear Lady Mildred, don't you think you had better go to Lorina in the next room? Your sisters will be waiting for you to go through your dancing exercises with them."

"I am going, dear Miss Ainslie, in a minute; but I thought Lady Lyndon would like to hear of one of the few remarkable characters of whom our establishment can boast. Now, don't you feel interested in our strange keeper?"

"He seems to have led a roving life, like many other young men of his age and station in life," returned the lady to whom this question was addressed.

"But he is not a young man, by any means, Lady Lyndon. Not that he looks in the least old. There is something so very picturesque about the man. I have now and then ridden with papa, or one of my brothers, as far as his house. I had a curiosity to see him, hearing of the wild life he had been leading in America, and I was so much struck with his appearance (for he is very handsome), and his independent,

and yet respectful manner, that I made a sketch of him when I got home. I assure you, Lady Lyndon, that Miles Woodhouse is quite a study."

"Come, Lady Mildred, you have bestowed enough of your enthusiasm on the keeper," said the governess to her pupil; then, turning to Lady Lyndon, who sat quietly attentive to all that passed, but saying little herself, remarked, "You must know, Lady Lyndon, that this young lady has generally some *protégée*, to whom she is, for the time being, devoted, amongst some of the dependants here, and to whom she is not always as constant in her regard as she is enthusiastic at first. Just now, I believe, she is very much *épris* with the young daughter of this said Miles Woodhouse."

"Oh! yes, Nora Woodhouse is lovely!" said Mildred.

"A daughter!" said Lady Lyndon. "I thought this poor man had lost his wife and children in the backwoods of America?"

"Yes, so he did; and then he returned to

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, disgusted with his savage life. But he did not get on at that time; then some friend, I don't know who, got him a situation in a house in Liverpool—a rich merchant's house. And now comes the romance of his life. The merchant's daughter fell in love with poor Miles, and they eloped—very wrong, of course—but so they did, and went to Australia, to be out of the way of the incensed parent; and then they had to work hard when they got there; and Miles Woodhouse seems to have turned his strength and talents to good account in roughing it in the Bush out there; and they say he made money by catching and dealing in wild cattle there, and in time he became pretty well off. And then in an evil day he took a partner, and this man proved a great rogue, and decamped with all Miles' money. But a worse thing happened then; his young wife caught a fever and died, and his boy too, and he was left alone in the world with this young girl. So, not knowing what to do with her out there, and without friends or money, he determined to

return again to England. He thought perhaps his wife's father would forgive her then, and be kind to his little girl. He cared nothing about himself."

"What brought them here, then?" asked Lady Lyndon.

"Oh! his wife's father was dead, and had left everything to a nephew who had loved his daughter, and of course hated poor Woodhouse. So there was nothing to be got there; and he came here, because in former days an uncle of his was settled in Middleborough (our nearest town, where you and Miss Ainslie went), and had kept an Inn, and had been very kind to him and his family when they fell into trouble."

"And what is become of that innkeeper?" asked Lady Lyndon abruptly.

"With his usual ill-luck, the poor man found that they—that is, the innkeeper and his wife—had died some years before. So he did not know what to do, but, accidentally meeting a gentleman he had known in Australia, he

asked him for his advice ; and this Mr. Jones told him of papa's wanting a keeper and general overlooker under Hillyard ; and after some little parleying about the matter, he applied for and got the situation. And now, as I have told all my story, I will go to Lorina."

"Well, you see, the keeper's story is rather a peculiar one," said Miss Ainslie with a smile, as her eldest pupil vanished into the next room.

"He seems to have had his ups and downs in the world, like many other people. And this poor little motherless girl that Lady Mildred so kindly patronizes, what of her?" asked Lady Lyndon in reply.

"She is at school in Middleborough. Woodhouse was anxious to give her a good education, with a view, I suppose, to her becoming a governess hereafter."

"Is she a nice child?"

"She is a very beautiful one, but you can suppose she has had as yet but little training in the Bush."

"Yet her mother was a lady, it seems."

“Yes ; and that fact is never absent from the girl’s mind, or her father’s either, I believe, for that matter ; and that was one reason why he was desirous of sending her away from his own surroundings, and placing her in this school of semi-gentility, where they take her on very moderate terms, as a half boarder, to make herself generally useful.”

“How old is she ?”

“I think they told me past twelve ; but she is tall of her age and looks older. Mildred brought her to the Castle one day. I did not sanction it, and Lady Fullerton forbid the association ; it was certainly not a desirable one,”

Lady Lyndon did not speak for a minute, and then she observed rather drily—

“And yet, I suppose, there is nothing against this poor girl, except that her father is earning an honest livelihood, and has been found more clever than most men of his position.”

“We must respect *les convenances*, dear Lady Lyndon. I do not think the kind of notice my enthusiastic pupil was inclined to bestow upon

little Nora Woodhouse was likely to be of any benefit to the girl, who seemed very well inclined to put herself upon the footing of a companion."

"Poor child ! she had, I suppose, been brought up to consider herself the equal, if not superior, of those about her ; but the hard lesson she has yet to learn will soon be duly enforced upon her mind where she is now placed."

"And yet, forgive me, Lady Lyndon, but I cannot but think that it is one you would have been as ready to teach—had Miss Lyndon been in question—as was Lady Fullerton."

"I daresay," said Lady Lyndon, with a strange smile, "what you say is very true—no doubt I should have been quite as ready to disown the keeper's daughter as a companion to my Clare, as you or Lady Fullerton might be for the young ladies, your pupils. We—at least, I—can preach much better than I practise. Equality is not a thing to be thought of in these days, or any merit to be recognised on that footing, except that of fortune and position."

Miss Ainslie had the tact to hold her tongue, and not remind the lady that there *were* other qualifications which, as in her own case, had leapt the barrier and procured her the honour of her present visitors' friendship and favour. The situation of the keeper's daughter was certainly by no means parallel, so the governess let it pass, and looked upon Lady Lyndon's sudden demonstration in favour of equality as a little caprice which savoured more of contradiction than her usual sound sense. To turn the subject, Miss Ainslie then remarked,

"I daresay you found Lord Tudor a pleasant companion in your walk to-day?"

Lady Lyndon cast a quick, scrutinizing glance upon her companion's face, which, like her own, was half hidden in shadow, and only revealed by the fitful gleams of firelight. Then, seeing Miss Ainslie appeared to attach no particular weight to the remark, she answered,

"Oh! yes, he is extremely pleasant. We talked over places where we had been abroad, and public characters that we either knew or

had heard of there. I suppose you see a great deal of Lord Tudor here ?”

“ Yes ; and I had also the pleasure of knowing a good deal of his lordship before I came here. My father was the rector of his parish, and had been his tutor before he went to Eton ; so there was always a considerable degree of intimacy in our younger days. When my poor father died, circumstances rendered it necessary that I should seek my own livelihood as a governess. I have one sister well married, and a brother also, a clergyman, married, and with a large family, so I could not be a burden to either. I was not brought up to the *métier*, but had happily received a more than usually solid education from my father. My first attempt was made in a foreign family, by which means I acquired ease and practice in modern languages ; and when my pupils there were grown up, I was very thankful to find I could make myself useful in my old friend Lady Fullerton’s family.”

“ Ah ! no wonder she also considers herself

so fortunate, as I have heard her say, in getting you to come to her. It is not like a common case of governess. Then you like what you know of Lord Tudor?"

"I should be very ungrateful were I not to do so. He has always been a kind and considerate friend to me and mine. I know it is the fashion to speak of his lordship as a mere man of the world, and to call him fastidious and satirical. I cannot agree with the latter, at least—except in cases where he meets with pretension and self-conceit, and then I have heard him treat them in a very well-deserved manner. He has singular penetration as to character, and the most unfeigned contempt for 'shams' of every kind."

"I do not know," replied Lady Lyndon, "that I should consider him quite a fair judge in many cases. His experience is so one-sided that, though he may see, or suspect, the errors which are often incidental to a different position, he is unable to make those excuses which most human beings need from their fellow-men. I

have always thought that a person living in such a world of prosperity as Lord Tudor, must necessarily become a hard judge of the tempted and suffering portion of mankind."

"I have known his lordship do and say many kind things when least expected. I do not deny that he is fastidious, for he has had the command of everything this world can bestow ever since he could remember; and people have deferred to and made much of him in consequence, till he has almost longed for a little contradiction."

"I should imagine such a position as you describe would tend to make him very intolerent of it."

"Not if it were genuine, honest contradiction. He has a peculiar horror of everything that is artificial, and, I have often observed, is very quick in detecting it."

"What does Lord Tudor really think of this —this keeper, whose eventful story I have just been hearing? He spoke as if he supposed the man to be in some way a doubtful character;

but he might have only been laughing at Horace."

"Oh, yes, that was all; he does not quite approve of the young people here making such a hero of Miles Woodhouse; but I don't think he suspects him of any felonious antecedents in earnest."

"Then it might be as well to be more careful in speaking of a man's character, though possibly that consideration would not weigh against a jest." Then Lady Lyndon got up, and saying, "We shall meet again this evening, Miss Ainslie?" left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER tête-à-tête was going on that evening, in the boudoir, which was not far distant. Lord Tudor looked in upon his sister, as he often did, soon after he returned from his walk with Lady Lyndon and her daughter.

The brother and sister were much attached to each other, and had known no other near relations until Lady Isabella's marriage. That event had not separated them much; they continued to interest themselves in each other's welfare, and to keep up an intercourse that was rarely interrupted for any length of time.

Lady Fullerton looked up with a pleased

smile as she saw who her visitor was, and, laying down her book, said,

“I am glad you are come for a little chat, Ferdinand. I have not seen you comfortably since your arrival last evening.”

Lord Tudor took the place his sister cleared for him on her sofa, and then observed,

“You will be surprised to hear how I have been amusing myself this afternoon, Isabella.”

The lady only looked up with a questioning smile and said,

“Indeed! how?”

“I have been taking a long walk.”

“Yes; have you been ordered to take walking exercise? I did not know you were fond of long walks; but perhaps you were not alone?”

“No, I have been walking with Lady Lyndon and her daughter.”

“I hope you found them pleasant,” said Lady Fullerton, with a slightly questioning look.

"Yes—very."

"Which was the attraction—the mother or the daughter?—though I suppose it was that handsome Lady Lyndon, the daughter is such a mere cipher in her mother's presence; but they are both very well in their separate ways."

"Yes, in their separate ways; I consider them very different."

"Lady Lyndon can talk pleasantly enough at times, and when she forgets to be precise, and can leave off watching her daughter and her son. She seems to consider she has to act for them as well as herself, and looks upon their future establishment in life as her own concern much more than theirs."

"But if she ever thinks of marrying herself, I suppose she will leave her children more at liberty to follow their own inclinations?" asked the gentleman. Lady Fullerton smiled as she answered,

"I am quite persuaded at present Lady Lyndon has no thoughts of the kind for herself, and

confines her matrimonial designs entirely to the younger members of her family."

"No one can tell what they may do till they are tempted, so I should not give much for your opinion on Lady Lyndon's case, Isabella, if she happened to meet with some one who might strike her fancy—I beg her pardon, I ought to say 'touch her heart,' I suppose."

"What do you mean, Ferdinand?" exclaimed his sister, rousing herself, and looking full in his face. "You do not mean to say, after finding no one to suit your most fastidious taste all these many years, you have fallen a victim after a few hours' acquaintance with this beautiful widow? Her large fortune, I know, is nothing to you, for you have more than you want; but handsome as she is, it does surprise me!"

"No wonder; and it would surprise me still more were there any foundation in your surmises. No, no widow for me, be she ever so handsome or fascinating; but I will own to

you, Isabella, there is something singularly taking in that daughter of hers."

"What, in Clare Lyndon? You surprise me again, Ferdinand; no one can deny she is beautiful, but she is so inanimate she has nothing to say for herself; you cannot say she is either amusing or agreeable?"

"I think her very silence agreeable, after the constant flow of conversation and remarks I am accustomed to hear, and expected to answer. She may not be 'amusing,' like Audrey, but that is a great relief to me."

"In fact, you admire Clare Lyndon for her negative qualities?" asked Lady Fullerton, rather anxiously.

It was genuine interest in her brother's concerns that prompted Lady Fullerton's inquiries. She had, too, every desire to see him married—but it must be well. His peerage was one of the most ancient in England—the fortune and property attached to it enormous; but it was all entailed on the nearest male heir, and would in consequence pass to a distant relative,

of whom they knew nothing, should Lord Tudor die unmarried, or without a son. So Lady Fullerton felt her hopes decline as each year passed and left her brother still a bachelor. Now she could hardly credit that the admiration he implied, rather than expressed, for a girl so much younger than himself, and as yet unknown to fame or fashion, could be of any serious nature. She would have said, had anyone asked her opinion, that Clare Lyndon was the last person in the world likely to suit her brother, though, at the same time, she would not have been at all sorry to find he was thinking of her, or, indeed, of any well-born, well-bred girl, or woman, as a wife. She could not endure that their obscure Tudor cousin, with an unknown wife and numerous family, should, at some future time, succeed to all the honours and glories that her unmarried brother must leave behind him. She might, indeed, not be there to witness their triumph, but the possibility of it would haunt her living, and sorely distress her dying. At least, she persuaded

herself that such was the state of her feelings. She therefore listened to her brother's words respecting Clare, as he answered each objection she thought it right to bring forward, with a kind of pleasant incredulity, and listened anxiously for his replies. To that question respecting negative qualities, Lord Tudor pondered for awhile ere he answered, and then said, dropping the light tone in which he had been talking,

"We will not discuss negations, Isabella. I am perfectly serious when I tell you there is something in that girl that is inexpressibly fresh and charming in my eyes."

Then Lady Fullerton changed her tone to one of more feeling and interest, and replied,

"I always thought she was very nice, or, rather, would be, when she had seen a little more of the world, and was less under her mother's control, and learnt to take her own part a little more. I am sure, with her grace and beauty, she would improve wonderfully."

"Ah! sister mine, you would brush the bloom off the flower, the down off the fruit. The

very drawbacks you mention—or fancy such—are the things that make that girl so lovely to me. Listen to me. When I first saw her, looking like a saint or an angel, the very impersonification of a poet's dream, the 'Beatrice' of Dante, I admired with all my heart, as well as all my eyes; but I considered it a beautiful display, a first-rate effort of genius, and acting of uncommon talent. Well, after that I was surprised, and rather pleased, to find she shunned all further display that evening—declined the dance, in short, and all the homage she would have received. I was curious afterwards to see both the mother and daughter in the calm, cool morning hour. I had my wish, and the first glance of Miss Lyndon's sweet face showed me that it was all pure, lovely nature that I had been admiring in 'Beatrice' the night before. For when she looked up, I caught the same look I had admired so much; and yet it was so simple, so unstudied, that I saw it was but the reflection of the angel-nature within."

"My dear Ferdinand," exclaimed his sister, in

the utmost astonishment, "you do surprise me! And I am indeed pleased you should have met with any girl you can so cordially admire and approve; and I really do believe she is all she appears to be in respect to temper and amiability. I only fancied you would require more *savoir faire* and fashion in the woman you would select as your wife; but all that, at her age, and under your auspices, would come naturally soon enough."

Then Lord Tudor laughed, as if in amusement at his sister's having jumped so speedily to a conclusion; but there was a ring of pleasure in the tone as he said,

"You have settled matters very quickly for me, Isabella, and without asking anybody's consent—either the mother, or the lady herself."

"I should not think Lord Tudor runs much risk of a rejection," said his sister. "At least, not if the voice of the *élite* of London society is to be believed."

"No, I should not have many fears in that

atmosphere; but I seem to have suddenly got translated into a purer air."

"Yours is really a case of love at first sight, Ferdinand. Who would have believed it of you? Not I, who have known you so many years, and better than most people, I believe. Why, it is not twenty-four hours since you first saw her!"

"You make the case worse than it is, Isabella. I am not *in love*, as people call it, only I think if I see much more of Miss Lyndon I am a little in danger. She just answers my notions of a thoroughly lovable woman—beautiful in person, graceful and refined in manner, and cultivated in mind; but I have not yet named her greatest and most surpassing charm."

Lady Fullerton opened her eyes.

"What more remains to be mentioned?"

"Her voice. I really think it was that as much as anything else that so put a spell upon me. There is something almost touching in the tone of her voice, you seldom hear that peculiar tone; but it goes to the heart, let the

subject on which she speaks be ever so trivial, there is that same note in it—in fact, she could not speak in any other key, but it pleads as it were with you. Who could resist it?”

“Not you, I am sure, Ferdinand. Did she talk much to you in your walk to-day?”

“She joined in very nicely and naturally when her mother appealed to her; but she talked more to Horace, when he joined us, very full, as usual, of the perfections of Miles Woodhouse.”

“Not a very interesting subject, I should think, to the two ladies.”

“I don’t know—he furnished a good deal of talk one way or another.”

Lord Tudor said nothing to his sister about the poaching treat in prospect. He did not care to spoil the boy’s sport; and he would have said he was quite able to take care of himself. Besides, with Horace’s well-known talking propensities, he did not think they ran much risk of falling in with any depredators that night. Neither was it a subject that interested him

deeply ; and he left his sister's room without having alluded to the matter.

The dinner-party that evening was very much reduced, and there were no ladies but those of the family (excepting Lady Lyndon and her daughter). Lady Fullerton was therefore able, without appearing particular, to send Clare in to dinner with her brother, and afford him that opportunity of improving his acquaintance.

Lord Tudor was well pleased with the arrangement, though he did not show it by any undue *empressement* of manner. He, however, talked a good deal to her, gradually drawing her out to talk herself; and all in such a quiet, easy way that Clare responded most satisfactorily to her neighbour's endeavours. She thought Lord Tudor very pleasant, and almost wondered what his nieces could mean when they spoke of him as a formidable personage—she did not, in fact, consider him at all more so than Lord Fullerton; and she always thought him very kind and good-natured to her, though she

would never have expected her host to take as much trouble to entertain and enlighten her on various points as his brother-in-law was doing that evening.

Perhaps Lord Tudor would not have been altogether satisfied had he suspected that lovely Clare Lyndon would have thus classed him with that respectable *père de famille*, and weighed their merits on the same footing. He was also happy in the consciousness that he was some years the junior of his brother-in-law, and had in that respect slightly the advantage of his sister, who was two or three years his senior.

Still, Lord Tudor never affected to appear younger than he was; the fact of his actual age was well established, and as well known as himself. He was too well received in society by the youngest ladies to have any misgivings as to his being at all *passé*; nor did he think for a moment that the disparity of age between him and Clare would operate to his disadvantage, should he feel inclined to

honour her with his serious notice. He was, in his own opinion, much the same that he had been in appearance for the last ten years—no longer a decidedly young man; but neither was he an elderly aspirant, struggling to keep his footing still amongst those from whom he was separated by a whole generation. Without being handsome, he was well-looking enough, with that appearance of high breeding and fashion which most people would have considered preferable to any amount of regular good looks.

No person could possess the art of easy conversation in greater perfection than did Lord Tudor. He had an admirable facility for suiting his topics to the person he addressed. He was equally at home in discussing politics, literature, art, or the social topics of the day. He could be very fascinating, when it pleased him to be so. But there were times when it did *not* suit, and persons whom, without perhaps actually snubbing, he caused to feel very uncomfortable in his presence, after they might

have been hardy enough to presume upon his acquaintance without being duly qualified. It was, then, as may be supposed, only his *patte de velours* that he tendered to Clare Lyndon, and she in all good faith accepted it for what it appeared, and soon felt on the easiest, pleasantest terms with her agreeable neighbour. She was almost surprised, in the simple humility of her nature, to find so clever a man (as she supposed Lord Tudor to be), actually asking her opinion on various subjects, and treating all she advanced as worthy of notice and consideration. She sometimes wished her mother were at hand to answer for her; but that not being the case, she was obliged to draw on her own intellectual resources, and, in so doing, afforded much satisfaction to her listener. He noted all Clare timidly advanced, and decided favourably on the tone and quality of her mind. She was so well amused that the dinner-time appeared unusually short that day, and she was quite surprised when Lady Fullerton rose to leave the room.

Lady Lyndon had been an attentive observer of all that passed at dinner. She could not hear the subjects that were discussed between her daughter and Lord Tudor, but she saw they were interesting to both, and she fancied she detected symptoms of incipient admiration on the gentleman's part. When he came into the drawing-room, about an hour after, with the intention of renewing his pleasant conversation with Clare, he saw that her mother had taken a place very near. She had, in fact, moved there a short time before, when the school-room party left the room, having bestowed all her time and attention previously on Miss Ainslie. Lady Lyndon, on their departure, was glad to have the opportunity of securing a vacant place by her daughter before the gentlemen entered the room.

Lord Tudor perceived the occupation the instant he came in, for his eye had sought for Clare, and he smiled to himself as he thought that, if he attempted to woo the daughter, the mother intended it should be through herself.

Well, so be it ; he was quite equal to the occasion, and was rather amused at the novelty of the position ; neither was he displeased at it. He had hitherto always found the course cleared before him—everything had been too easy. He saw now he was to be thoroughly sifted, and himself and his words and actions deliberately weighed in the balance of that careful and observant lady's unerring judgment. She fully intended to make a third with him and her daughter, should he be disposed to renew his pleasant conversation with the latter. He was half inclined to balk the prudent design, and leave Lady Lyndon *plantée là* by her daughter's side, whilst he would either take up a book or go and talk to some one else.

Whilst he thus hesitated, Clare happened to look up from her work, and seeing her pleasant dinner-companion so near, and looking at her, she smiled, as she might have done upon Mr. Denbigh, or any other middle-aged gentleman of her acquaintance, without a *soupçon* of flirtation or coquetry. It was enough ; he gave

back an answering smile, and coming up, said,

“I see you are thinking of what I said in respect to ‘woman’s work’ in general. May I ask what yours is?” Then, without waiting for an answer, he drew a chair close up, and began talking for the edification of both Lady Lyndon and her daughter.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was an early retirement at the Castle that night. The young men of the party went off sooner than usual to the smoking-room (as was supposed), and the ladies did not linger long after. Lady Lyndon seemed glad to get her daughter away into the safe retreat of her own apartment. She evidently was somewhat suspicious of the approaches that Lord Tudor appeared inclined to make. She might no doubt be induced to look more favourably upon him in time; but as yet he and all his history was strange to her, and she was never very partial to strangers. She would not for the world have discussed the subject with Clare; but she remarked, as she dismissed her into the adjoining room,

"You don't look as tired as usual, I think, Clare."

To which she replied, in all innocence,

"No, I am not the least sleepy to-night. We are earlier than usual; and Lord Tudor talked so pleasantly, it kept one amused."

Her mother's only answer was, "Yes, I think it is rather early; but don't sit up reading. Good night." And with a quiet kiss they separated.

Clare was not long in obeying her mother's injunctions, and soon fell into a quiet, dreamless sleep. Lady Lyndon was herself in no hurry to follow her daughter's example. She dismissed her maid more quickly even than was her general custom; as at no time was she greatly indebted to her services, for she preferred waiting on herself. Whether it was the result of early habits or of a naturally independent nature, it is certain that Lady Lyndon's maid led a very easy life. She seemed to be retained more as a necessary appendage to the position of the Lady of Lyndon, than as, in

most cases, the indispensable minister to her own personal comfort.

It was very different with Clare—her lady's maid had no sinecure office—she liked to be waited upon, and never did a thing for herself more than was incumbent upon her to perform. It was rather strange that, whilst Lady Lyndon was so little exacting in her own ways and habits, she never inculcated a similar way of acting on her daughter—on the contrary, she rather fostered all her little helpless ways and abundantly supplied her luxurious surroundings. It never occurred to Clare but that it was as needful for her to be tended and waited upon as that she must breathe in order to exist.

Both the ladys'-maids had been dismissed that night; and no doubt after the prolonged vigils of the preceding one, were as ready as Clare to go to bed, and to sleep with all possible dispatch.

Lady Lyndon seemed relieved when she was left alone; and then, after pacing rather restlessly to and fro in her room for some time, she

sat down to think, and to take counsel with herself—the only person whom her reticent habits ever permitted her to confide in. There was a look of deep thought on her beautiful features, and they were somewhat contracted with an unwonted expression of doubt and uncertainty. She had heard strange tidings that day, and she was racked with anxiety as to how she ought to act upon those tidings, or whether she was called upon to take cognisance of them in any way. From that doubt there sprang up in her mind a whole host of recollections—some sorrowful, some of a more pleasant nature, but all more or less imbued with that tinge of sadness with which we look upon a dead past, and feel that it can never, never come again. Many of the fellow-actors in those scenes may be gone, some never to return in this life; and others, as well as ourselves, so changed, perchance, that it seems almost incredible that such times were, and that we, our actual selves, lived and moved and played our passing parts in them.

Thus the early scenes of Lady Lyndon's life flitted across the field of her imagination. How changed indeed was everything around her since that long past time! Was it possible that it was herself who had taken part in those scenes, and had ever found her pleasure and enjoyment in them? Had she not often thought and believed that all were dead and gone who had shared those times with her? Then she wandered on in her recollections to one cherished memory; and how all had changed for her from the time she had first seen him. How could she ever have won that priceless love?—how ever deserved that constant trusting devotion? How could she best prove herself worthy of the unbounded confidence of that love which had overlooked so much? How could she ever repay it?

Then she answered herself, and urged that she must continue her present plan of self-abnegation—live only for and in her children, seeking their advancement in every possible way, and in order to do so must retain their destinies

firmly in her own hands, seeing it had been the design of their father to afford her every facility. Had he not always mistrusted Vere? Had Sidney lived, how different everything would have been! And she would have been relieved from responsibilities which sometimes seemed overwhelming. The lady wept as she recalled the fatal day in which her first-born, her husband's most darling son, had met his death. And who had been the unfortunate cause? Was it not Vere? And yet, poor Vere, he had nearly shared his brother's grave, and one was not more answerable than the other for the fatal accident. Then all the events attending it rose up vividly in her remembrance. She could hear the voice of the old boatman, how it faltered when speaking of the boys; how they had gone out with him in bright health and spirits that morning, and an altercation had arisen between the brothers about a little dog they had taken with them. The dog was Vere's, and Sidney wished to

throw it into the water, and teach it to swim. This was firmly resisted by Vere, and he struggled with Sidney to prevent him carrying his desire into execution. Whilst thus engaged, the small boat lurched, and both boys and the little dog fell into the water. There was only one saved, and that was Vere. Poor Vere, thought his mother, bore all the blame, for his father always looked upon the terrible misfortune as his fault; and he never forgave the boy, because his temper was high and resolute, and that of Sidney was naturally yielding and gentle, like his sister's. Sir Montague felt sure the fatal catastrophe was caused by Vere's spirit of opposition and contention. Yet no doubt Sidney was as obstinate on that occasion as his brother—for, thought his mother, as she recalled the peculiar temper of her first-born, he could at times be as determined as any one, though oftener he was more like the Lyndons, soft and gentle to a fault; while Vere, said she to herself, is, I know, more like me in disposition—more like *us* in general.

Who were the *us* to whom she referred? She could hardly have defined her own meaning, so few were there of her own family whom she remembered. But she knew they were a harder and a ruder race than the aristocratic Lyndons, who for centuries had been born and reared in luxury. There was, however, nothing pleasant or happy in that thought, though there was one deep and tender recollection associated with those early days that even now appealed to her heart with a fond, lingering yearning that was almost foreign to her nature and her usual imperturbability. At last she roused herself with a little shiver, saying, as she did so—

“No, no; I must not think of it, or even desire it. What possible good *could* come of it?—and much evil *might*—so let me crush down what little feeling pleads for indulgence. I will have no interest in life but *theirs*—no tenderness as regards the memory of the long past—no object in existence except to promote the welfare of *his* children.”

Lady Lyndon's reflections were suddenly disturbed by a hesitating tap at the door. This was rather a startling circumstance in itself, for it was past midnight, and Lady Lyndon felt sure all the house was gone to bed ; so her natural caution prompted her to turn the key, and then ask,

“ Who is there ? ”

“ It is only I—Miss Ainslie,” said the well-known voice of the governess in reply.

The key was promptly unturned, the door opened, and the two ladies stood face to face.

“ Anything the matter ? ” was the natural inquiry on the part of Lady Lyndon, who had never received a visit from Miss Ainslie in her bedroom before, even in the daytime, so wondered what could have brought her there in the middle of the night.

The governess, apologising for her intrusion, asked permission to enter, and in a few words made Lady Lyndon understand the state of the case—telling her that, on going into her pupils' bed-rooms, as was her custom the last

thing every night, she had found Lady Evelyn sitting up in bed crying, and saying she had just had a bad dream—that Horace was shot in going after the poachers.

“Then it came out,” said Miss Ainslie, “that Horace had confided his intentions to his sister Evelyn. You know she is his favourite, and the nearest his own age, and she is devoted to him. I pacified the poor girl, telling her I did not think Horace was in any danger, and that in all probability he was in bed and asleep by that time, as I did not think he would stay out so late. Then Evelyn told me that they were ‘all gone,’—by which she meant all the young men staying in the house, and that Horace told her they were going to have such a jolly night of it; but they did not care to talk about it, as it might get about, and they might be disappointed.”

“Well,” said Lady Lyndon, with her usual deliberation, “I do not see that we have anything to do with these young men’s adventures. They will go their own way, and, I should hope,

are able to take care of themselves. My son is no doubt of the party?"

"Oh! yes; Evelyn mentioned Sir Vere's name, and that of Mr. Denbigh—I mean the young man—and the two or three others who are staying here."

"Well, if there's safety in a multitude, I think we may make ourselves easy on their account," said Lady Lyndon, with a quiet smile, still wondering why the good governess should have taken the trouble to come and rouse her up at an hour when she might have been supposed to be asleep. Miss Ainslie said, in answer to the lady's look,

"I hardly know why I came to your ladyship more than to anyone else; but the fact is, after leaving Evelyn, I went and sat some time in my own room musing, and afterwards reading; then, wondering what sort of night it might be, I opened my window, and, as it was very mild, I put my head out into the darkness—for there is no moon, and only a star or two visible. I was trying to see how many I could count, when I

was startled by a sound like the report of a gun at some distance, followed quickly by two or three more shots."

Lady Lyndon looked up quickly.

"What, you think there is an affray actually going on at this time with the poachers?"

"I have no doubt about it; and I fear some mischief will be the consequence."

"But we can do nothing?" asked the lady.

"Not at this moment; but it is as well to be on the alert, if any harm is done, that we may be able to give assistance should it be required."

"You are right," said Lady Lyndon, in a suppressed tone, adding, "I will return with you to your sitting-room, and look out and listen with you. I am afraid of opening this window, for fear of rousing Clare and frightening her, as she is in the next room, so let us go at once to yours."

Lady Lyndon gathered up her beautiful hair, which she had been brushing at intervals, and coiling it round her head, took up a large shawl, and wrapping it over her dressing-gown,

motioned to Miss Ainslie that she was ready to accompany her. They walked carefully along the passages, which, softly carpeted, returned no echo to their footsteps; and so, without being heard, they passed along, and soon reached the school-room. The window was partly open, as Miss Ainslie had left it, and Lady Lyndon seated herself by it, whilst Miss Ainslie stood resting her hand on the back of her chair.

They remained thus in silence for some minutes. It was a quiet, close, dark night, and there was something oppressive in the very stillness. At last, as if weary of the silence, Lady Lyndon asked, in a low voice,

“Was Lord Tudor of the party?”

“I understood certainly not; and I do not think it would be an expedition at all in his lordship’s way.”

“Only the young men, then?”

“Yes; and the keepers—at least, the under one and his men. The old man never goes out on these night-adventures now. And I hear the poachers are a bold set. They have some

very bad characters amongst them, and this Miles Woodhouse has been very active against them."

"Ah! then they will be on the alert against him, in their turn."

"No doubt. So we may hope they may turn their attention to him, and leave the young gentlemen alone."

An expression of angry scorn passed over the beautiful features of the lady as she sat there, only revealed by the expiring firelight, and two candles which had burnt very low; but it was felt in the tone of her voice, as she turned round and looked up in the calm face of the governess, and said,

"Yes, I suppose that is the general feeling—let the poor suffer and the rich enjoy! Surely this man's life is of as much value to himself and his daughter—the child you told me of this afternoon—as the pampered lives of the right honourable young men who are this night sharing his perils!"

"Oh! yes, yes; I never meant otherwise,"

said Miss Ainslie, earnestly. "But, hark, dear Lady Lyndon, don't you hear something—some one running? Now it comes near, up the lawn, close to the house. Who is there?" she repeated, in low, anxious tones, bending out of the window.

"Oh! you are up, are you? I will be with you in an instant," returned a voice, and in a minute afterwards Horace came bounding into the room.

"I am so glad you are up, Miss Ainslie. We have had a bad job down there. The men mustered very strong. We had quite a fight, and all in the dark. We could hardly tell friends from foes, or know who's hurt or not."

"I am glad to see you are safe, at least, Horace," said Miss Ainslie.

"Oh! I'm all right and tight enough. But don't stand parleying here. I want to call up some of the men, and send down to the wood-end field."

"Any one hurt?" asked Miss Ainslie.

"Well, I am afraid Sir Vere has got hit pretty

sharply, and there's poor Woodhouse as good as dead, if he's not already."

A cry of pain, sharp, but suppressed on the instant, first revealed the presence of Lady Lyndon to the boy. He sprang forward, and in his kind-hearted way took hold of her hand.

"Pray forgive my being so abrupt. I did not know you were here. But I am sure Sir Vere will be all right in time, for he spoke to me just before I started, and said, 'Don't frighten my mother, or let Clare know to-night. I shall be much better to-morrow.'"

"Where are they?" was all the answer.

"*They?*" asked the boy.

"Yes, and the other wounded man," said the lady almost sternly.

"Oh! the keepers are taking him home; and we want some easy conveyance to bring Sir Vere in, and to hurt him as little as possible."

And then the boy rushed from the room, to give orders and make up for lost time.

Miss Ainslie hardly dared look towards the mother of the wounded man, feeling how painfully deep must be her state of anguish and suspense. She was, however, preparing her little speech of comfort, and was beginning "We must hope," when it was cut short with—

"Yes, but we must act first. Please give orders to send immediately to Middleborough for the first medical man there; and then let my maid be called up and help me to prepare my son's room, that he may be carried there immediately."

"Sir Vere's room is sure to be ready," said Miss Ainslie.

"Yes, ready for him in health; but there are several little things to be attended to in the state in which we must expect to find him," said Lady Lyndon, not allowing herself to indulge in one outward sign of grief, or to display the bitter anxiety that was gnawing at her heart. The only question she addressed to the governess was—"Horace did not say where he was wounded?"

“He possibly did not know ; but he said he was able to speak.”

“Yes, I heard that,” replied Lady Lyndon with a sigh.

Soon after they heard a carriage drive out of the yard ; and Lady Lyndon, accompanied by Miss Ainslie, went upstairs to her son’s room, to wait his arrival there.

CHAPTER VI.

THE hour of suspense was over at last. But it had been a trying time for Lady Lyndon, waiting and watching to see her son brought back, and knowing nothing of the nature of the injury he had received.

However, let a thing be ever so painful, it must come to an end. So did the poor lady's miserable moments, at least the worst of them. Any certainty is more bearable than the long lingering torment of suspense. She had schooled herself to meet her son with an unmoved aspect; and seeing he was perfectly conscious, though in great suffering, her worst fears became allayed. There was a severe wound on the knee, but happily no further hurt. Still

there might be serious apprehensions as to the ultimate nature of the injury received.

When the surgeon from Middleborough (a clever man in his way) arrived, he looked somewhat grave. Sir Vere watched his face rather anxiously, and said—

“It is a bad hurt, I know, doctor; but you must make the best of it. I cannot consent to lose a limb.”

“Well, we will do our best to prevent it, Sir Vere, but——”

“Ah! well, if there is a chance, pray give me the benefit of it; and now you must do your best or your worst by me.”

And then Vere Lyndon submitted himself to the torture of searching for and extracting the shot. After that operation he did not feel inclined to speculate or talk much, especially as perfect rest and quiet were strongly enjoined. Just as the doctor was leaving the room, Sir Vere called to him to return, and in a faint voice said,

“Only about that poor fellow, the keeper,

Woodhouse ; he helped me, and got shamefully beaten about in return. Will you look to him ?”

Lady Lyndon had returned to her son’s room after the operation just in time to catch the meaning of this whispered injunction to the surgeon. Her face turned a shade whiter than before as she listened ; and then, accompanying the doctor outside the door, she said,

“ You understand my son, sir ?”

“ Oh ! yes, madam—he wishes me to see poor Woodhouse. I have no doubt they have already called in Mr. Mapleson—he generally attends in the village here, for he lives near, and is, in fact, the parish doctor ; but as this no doubt is a case of great emergency, I will not hesitate to visit the poor man myself, and afford every help I can in the case. I am quite sure it would be as much the wish of Lord Fullerton that I should do so, as that of Sir Vere Lyndon.”

“ Then, pray, sir, lose no time ; and pray give the case every attention in your power. Do not spare anything that money can purchase.

I will be—that is, my son will be answerable for every expense. It seems,” she added, after a moment’s pause, “that he has been greatly indebted to him.”

Mr. Andrews rubbed his hands, and bowed with a comprehending look, and took his leave of the lady, promising to be with her early in the morning, and assuring her he should lose no time in despatching a telegraph to summon a famous London surgeon he named to Lady Lyndon to meet him at the Castle, and consult on Sir Vere’s case.”

“And pray do not neglect the keeper’s,” were the lady’s last words to the surgeon.

“A good, charitable woman that,” was his private ejaculation; and it was further repeated for Miss Ainslie’s edification, as he met that lady anxiously awaiting his report after his inspection of the patient.

“I believe Lady Lyndon is, as you say, a thoroughly good and charitable woman, and would be as anxious that this poor man, Miles Woodhouse, should receive the best medical

treatment, and every attention, as her own son. I have seen a good deal of Lady Lyndon, and have been peculiarly struck with the extreme interest she takes in the lower orders—it is not confined to any place or parish, but seems as universal in its application as suffering and misery itself.”

Perhaps Miss Ainslie’s speech savoured a little in its mode of expression of the governess itself; but it was attentively listened to by the man to whom it was addressed, and endorsed to Lady Lyndon’s credit accordingly.

The next day brought its own special burden of worries and anxieties. If expressions of sympathy and sorrow could have lightened her trouble, the Lady of Lyndon might have found hers relieved of more than half its weight. Every one was condoling with and attempting to comfort her; every one was surprised, and every one was sad to hear of the events of the past night. Then every one was indignant with the bold, bad men who had broken the law, had nearly murdered Lord Fullerton’s

gamekeeper, and injured his guest so severely that the consequences might be such as to render him a helpless cripple for life.

Lady Lyndon forced herself to come downstairs amongst her friends, and receive and answer their condolences *en masse*. She was not a person who ever took comfort from talking of her troubles—the heavier they were, the more closely she kept them to herself. It had been her only comfort that, when she lost her husband (that great and overwhelming sorrow of her life), she had been *alone*. Her children in such a case did not count—she could see as little or as much of them as she pleased. But it was a consolation to her then that there was no one (but them) to mourn with her. It would have driven her almost out of her senses—quiet and composed as she always appeared—had she been surrounded with friends and relations. Kind no doubt in word and intention, but inflicting torture on the wounded heart by every touch, however lightly laid. In the present case, many might have felt very differently;

and people in general would have said, or thought, how fortunate Lady Lyndon was to be amongst kind, sympathising friends at such a time, and not to be condemned to the loneliness of her own home, with none to cheer the invalid, or assist in keeping up the drooping spirits of herself and her gentle daughter.

But it was to her one of the most trying features of the case that, in Sir Vere's unfortunate state, they should be so far from home—thrown, as it were, so helplessly on the kindness and hospitality of their newly-made friends and acquaintances, and obliged to continue their guests. Thus it was Lady Lyndon fretted secretly, but seriously, that they should be so unfortunately detained at Hampden Castle. Her first eager inquiry, after hearing the double medical report the next morning, was, if all went on favourably, when would it be safe to move him to his own home? In answer to that she was informed that a month, at least, must elapse before it would be likely that Sir Vere could bear the motion of a carriage; and

to that decree Lady Lyndon felt herself obliged to submit. She was the most assiduous of nurses, confining herself almost entirely to her son's room, and an adjacent one prepared for herself. The apprehension of low fever setting in, of which there had been a threat, was the reason she gave for excluding all his friends.

One of the lady's most pressing causes of anxiety arose from the necessity of leaving Clare so much to herself, and the attentions of any of the gentlemen guests who might be disposed to pay them in her absence. Lord Tudor was the special object of her suspicions, for it was too evident that he looked on Clare Lyndon with very admiring eyes. It was not that Lady Lyndon would have objected to him as a son-in-law, had she been by to note the various steps by which he might endeavour to qualify himself for that position. But—and it was not without reason—she feared him as a thorough man of the world, who might find pleasure in amusing himself with so beautiful, and at the same time simple and unsophisticated a girl, so

many years his junior, meaning perhaps nothing all the time but to fill up his idle hours with some new and fresh object.

She saw Lord Tudor was a fixture at his sister's house for the time being, and she knew that, owing to his position in the family, he would have many opportunities of forwarding an intimacy with his nieces' friend. She therefore made a pretext for keeping Clare in her own room, and seldom appearing except under her maternal wing, when she left the nurse to keep watch in her son's room.

Nothing could exceed the kindness and consideration of both Lord and Lady Fullerton on this unlucky occasion. Everything that could tend to make both the mother and son feel they were the more welcome for the misfortune that kept them their guests was said and done. It was certainly a pity that Lady Lyndon's mind could not accept the hospitality as generously as it was accorded. However, she did her best, and was as gracious and genial on the occasion as her nature permitted. She might have

found, too, another interest, as time went on, in observing Lady Audrey, and the effect her son's accident had produced on the spirits of that usually buoyant young lady. She was the only person who did not appear, the morning after it happened, till the consultation of medical men had taken place. And when she did join the party assembled at dinner in the evening, it was evident that a change had passed over her since that time the preceding day; but those who remarked it most wondered the least.

In a few days Audrey was all herself again; for the medical reports were favourable, and the fear of Vere Lyndon being crippled for life had passed away. All she wanted then was leave to help in the nursing department; and without making her request appear too particular, Audrey asked Lady Lyndon whether a little more society would not be good for her son, and whether some of them (meaning herself and sisters) *chaperoned* by Miss Ainslie, might not help to amuse the invalid, and relieve her of some of her incessant attendance. Lady Lyn-

don's reply was somewhat stiffly given—

“I am sure you are very kind, dear Lady Audrey, and so is everybody here; but just at present I think Vere must be condemned to submit to that which is best for him, not pleasantest, as I am sure it would be to follow out your proposition.”

“How long do the doctors mean to keep him shut up in this absurd way?” asked Audrey.

“That must depend upon circumstances. You are perhaps aware that the great danger arises from the inflammation of the knee, and if that returned with severity, there is no saying what the consequences might be. Now, were Vere allowed to see any of his friends as freely as he and they might desire, the pleasant excitement might bring back the fever, for he is still weak; and then, if it fell into the wounded part, we might all regret that he had been allowed such an indulgence.”

Thus baffled, Audrey could petition no more; but she did not think the matter was as serious as the lady chose to represent it; and wondered

whether Vere Lyndon felt very impatient of his captivity, and when she might be allowed to see him again. *If* the all-important word had but been spoken, she should have felt she had an equal right with his mother to see and help to nurse and amuse him ; but, alas ! that word had *not* been said, and so they were as far apart as ever.

Perhaps Lady Lyndon, in her secret heart, was not sorry that it was so, and that her son still belonged exclusively to herself, and to no one else. She had made up her mind that he was to marry, and marry *well*, and she had admitted the idea of Lady Audrey Hampden, and tried to fancy she rejoiced at the prospect of her becoming his wife. She had even gone so far as to signify to her son that she gave her consent to his making the offer to her, and had not discouraged the idea when delicately hinted at by others about her. And yet she was jealously guarding her son's sick-room, keeping all aloof, that she might be all and everything to him, and that to her alone he might be indebted

for everything tending to his care, comfort, and eventual recovery. She felt then how great a pang it would cause her to give him up entirely to another, and relinquish the power she had always exercised over him (as far as it was possible), as well as over his sister. She was partly aware of the intense selfishness that lay at the root of all this feeling, and she could only excuse it to herself by temporising, and saying,

“I will arrange it all for him as soon as he gets better; but, in the meantime, he is still my own—only *mine*. Lady Audrey is eager to seize her prize; but she must wait *my* pleasure as well as his; and though he is headstrong and perverse at times, he has never really failed in duty and obedience to me.”

It may be asked what were Vere Lyndon's own sentiments all this time? He was perhaps worse than some of his friends supposed him to be, and less able to be amused than was imagined. The wound had been very severe, and had occasioned a severe shock to the whole nervous system, the consequences of which were

felt more after a short time than during the first few days when under the excitement of fever and all surrounding circumstances.

After that, the extreme languor which generally follows severe gun-shot wounds set in with a general lassitude and depression that only craved for complete repose, with exemption from every species of exertion, mental and bodily. He cared little where he was at the time—whether in his own home or that of a stranger, provided only he was not called upon to speak to any one, or listen to others talking. His mother, then, fully sufficed for all the society he wanted. Her quiet, calm speech and manner suited him exactly. She moved about him without noise or bustle—her cool hands were grateful to his touch; her fair face pleasant to look at. The idea of Audrey's gay laugh and lively discourse was by no means attractive to his sick imagination, and he felt no regret at her exclusion—all he craved was quiet.

CHAPTER VII.

IN the midst of all her trouble and anxiety respecting her son, Lady Lyndon had not been unmindful of the wounded keeper, Miles Woodhouse. The report of his state at first was as bad as it could be—his head was severely cut, and he had been afterwards, when insensible, very roughly handled, and otherwise injured. He had himself attacked the man who had shot Sir Vere, or, possibly, it might have been even worse for him. Notwithstanding the strength of the keeper's party, they had been unable to take any prisoners; and some of the men had also suffered, but far less severely. It had no doubt been a deeply-concerted plan on the part of the poachers, and had for its

principal object the punishment of their noted enemy, Miles Woodhouse.

About a week after the rencontre, one fine, still afternoon, when Sir Vere was sleeping, and Clare walking with Miss Ainslie and her pupils—the other girls being out riding—Lady Lyndon set off for a walk by herself to the keeper's cottage. She had not named her intention to any one, and she was congratulating herself that she was at last able to make the desired visit without any self-imposed companion. She crossed the park, and then, stopping at the lodge, received such instructions from the woman there as would enable her to find her way without further inquiry.

Lady Lyndon was enveloped in a large grey waterproof cloak, and a small black straw bonnet, with a thick Shetland veil, so that both her face and figure were well sheltered from observation.

The woman looked rather curiously at the lady, who, she was aware, must have come from the Castle; but not recognising the voice

or air of any of the servants there, ventured to ask her visitor whether she was newly come, and whether she knew anything of the poor man that was so badly hurt.

Lady Lyndon replied with perfect courtesy (as she always did to any inquiries from those in a lower position of life)—

“I have been a few weeks staying at the Castle, and hearing of this man’s sad state, I am anxious to see him, and ask whether I can do anything for him.”

“Oh! bless your kind heart, my dear!” exclaimed the old woman. “But don’t ye go all that lone way for that, for I know Mrs. Simmons sends him down beautiful broths and jellies; and Mr. Ford, my lord’s own man, drove by with a little hamper of wine for him two days ago. Not that it’s my opinion, from what I hear say, that it’s much use sending on him much besides doctor’s stuff at present—he’s too far gone to take it, so likely you may not care to go.”

“Yes, I wish to go. He helped to save a

life that is very dear to me, so I shall certainly go, and shall hope to see him too."

And with those words, spoken in a low, sad voice, the lady turned away, and resumed her solitary walk.

It was a pleasant November afternoon, but somewhat oppressive and close, so Lady Lyndon threw back her thick veil and loosened her cloak, whilst she walked quickly on through the lanes strewed with fallen leaves, and the air filled with the odour of their decay. She found no difficulty in making her way, according to the given instructions. The cottage was situated—as keepers' houses often are—in a lonely position. There was a large wood behind it, and a common or heath in front; on either side were lanes, which led to cottages some half mile distant. By way of protection to the lonely habitation, there were one or two herdsman's cottages not far off, and that was all that was to be seen of human occupation.

Lady Lyndon stood before the door, waiting, after she had rapped gently, for admission. It

was a rough-looking but substantial lodge, built of the stone of the country, and roofed in with the same. It was a superior sort of cottage to those near it, and had the garden been attended to, or flowers cultivated, might have been almost pretty in the Summer, and picturesque at all times: The door was slowly unbarred at last; and as Lady Lyndon turned to enter, she drew down her veil, and wrapped her cloak closer round her rich soft silken dress. The woman, who looked like an old nurse, stopped her for a moment, as if wishing to know more of her visitor before she was admitted, and asked,

“Please, ma’am, are you come to see the master? Do he know you are a-coming?”

The lady made answer quietly, saying,

“I am come from the Castle, from Sir Vere Lyndon, who is indebted to Mr. Woodhouse for his help the other night, and he is desirous to know how he is, and if he can be of any use to him.”

“Well, come in, then, for it’s cold standing in

the doorway," said the old dame, not sorry to have her solitude broken into for a short space even; and then, as she ushered the lady into the large open room, or keeping place, as it was called, she observed, "This is a lonely spot, and whiles my good man's out all the day, and the master laid upstairs, I have to be careful who comes and goes about the house. Will you take a seat, please, ma'am, for it's a long step to the Castle?"

"I am not tired, thank you," said Lady Lyndon, taking the seat that was offered, and looking round; and then asked, "How is the keeper?"

"Well, but sadly—but sadly. Still, he's hale and strong, and will thole through it, the doctor says. He has two on 'em coming every day, and they put me and my man in here to see after him; but it's a dreary place to bide in—not that I mind much."

"You are used to nursing, I daresay?" asked the lady, studying the shrewd, intelligent, though withered features of the dame opposite.

"You may well say that. I have been nurse general about here for more nor a score o' years past, and have had a deal of 'spearience."

"And you think favourably of this case?" asked the lady.

"Middling so," answered the old woman, pleased with a reference to her knowledge and wisdom—"Middling so; he'll get better no doubt, but he'll not be quite the man he was afore."

"May I see him?" asked the lady. "I have seen a great deal of illness, and I know Sir Vere would be glad that I could take a report from having seen him myself."

"Well, yes. Not that there's much good to be had by it, for he's not hisself whiles times, and his poor head and eyes are all bandaged up; and quiet—quiet is the great thing for he. No more talking nor one can help—that's why I mostly sits down below."

"I shall be very quiet, you may depend upon it," returned the lady.

"Well, then, we'll go up and see Master Miles

Woodhouse, not that he's much good for company the day."

The stairs led down direct into the kitchen, or house-place, where they were sitting, but there was a little landing at the top which shut in the bed-rooms above. These were three in number. At the door of one of these the old woman stopped for a moment as if listening. There was no sound, so she slowly turned the lock, and cautiously looked in, then turned round, beckoning the lady to follow her. The room was a tolerably-sized one, but the deep roof, sloping down almost to the floor, spoilt the symmetry of its aspect. The windows—two in number—were also, in deference to the arrangement of the roof, very low, and gave a dull, uncomfortable light to the apartment. But at that time it was as well that the light was so sparingly admitted, as the only shade was a thin, scanty check curtain, between the window and the sick man's bed, which stood just opposite, bare and unsheltered, and exposed to every ray of light and current of air

that might find entrance to the apartment. There, on that bare, curtainless bed, lay the stalwart form of the keeper, supine and helpless as a child, but even in that miserable position bearing ample evidence to the natural strength of his splendid frame, and showing how powerful an adversary the poachers had laid low. The head was bandaged, and so were the eyes, but still the uncovered features were very fine, and even delicately cut. Miles Woodhouse was evidently a man in the very prime of life, though there were plenty of silver threads visible in his dark beard, and the hair that had escaped the doctor's scissors. One arm, a model of manly muscular strength, lay feebly on the outside of the bedclothes, and the hand was now and then feebly lifted and clenched, as if his imagination was dwelling on the struggle that had brought him there.

"Here's a lady come a-asking how you fare, Master Woodhouse," said Nurse Martin, bending over her patient. There was no answer, except an uneasy muttering from the sick man.

"Never mind, nurse," said the lady; "I see, poor man, he is in no fit state to speak. I do not wish to talk to him, only just let me say one word."

Then Lady Lyndon drew near, and knelt down by the humble couch, and gently whispered a few words, inaudible to anyone save him to whom they were addressed. Whether it was a prayer the charitable lady uttered in the sick man's ear, or a kind inquiry as to his welfare, Dame Martin could not tell, but the few words seemed to have an unexpected effect upon him. A sort of smile flickered over his wan features, and he uttered some inarticulate murmurs as if in reply.

"He likes the sound of your voice, lady, whoever you may be, but he's wonderful tender and kind to anything that's gentle and soft, just as he's hard and bold and resolute-like to wicked things, like them poachers; and just see him with that bit of a girl, his own little daughter! he thinks she is even to the first lady of the land."

“Well, perhaps she may be just as pretty and good ; but where is the poor child ?”

“Oh, she bides still at the fine school in Middlebury, Miles Woodhouse sent her to, to learn to be a teacher in her turn, I suppose.”

“Why have you not sent for her to be with her father ?”

“What good would the child do here, her father not knowing her, and nobody to look after her, when all he wanted was for her to be put out in some decenter place nor this ? But, look you here, lady, see how nice he has everything for her, when he does treat hisself to a sight of the child.”

Nurse Martin stepped noiselessly across the room, and then, followed by Lady Lyndon, opened the door of the one opposite, which looked out of the gable end of the house. It enjoyed the benefit of a long narrow window, that lighted the pretty little room very pleasantly, and had the best look-out in the house. This room had evidently been fresh papered and painted. There was a neat little bed with

snowy white curtains and all the usual furniture of a lady's sleeping apartment, besides a book-case and low chair and table, leaving nothing to be desired.

"Ah, but you must see the parlour downstairs, where my young lady sits and sews when she's at home."

"But just let us go back and see how *he* is," pleaded the lady, her hand once more on the door that opened into the sick man's room.

"Well, you can bide a bit with *he*, while I go down and see to his broth; he takes but a sup at a time, but we mustn't miss time for that."

"On no account; and I will wait up here till you come back."

And then the heavy steps of the old woman might have been heard creaking down the stairs, whilst Lady Lyndon again stole up to the bed-side and knelt down beside the sufferer. For a few moments she hid her face in her hands and remained quite motionless; and then it seemed as though the quiet, calm wo-

man had suddenly broken down, and given way to a passion of tears. Perhaps she thought how it might have befallen her son—even worse than to that poor, miserable, mangled man lying before her; but she suddenly became calm, as a low voice said,

“Don’t cry, Norah, dear,”—the sick man’s lips ceased to move, the effort was almost too much; but the kind lady said,

“You will get better soon, Miles.”

“Never! poor little Norah. Ah! my pet—”

“Don’t fret,” said the lady, soothingly, as the poor man moaned, and turned his head uneasily from side to side,—“don’t fret, I’ll take care of her.”

“You! why you are only a dream; you are dead too! Oh, my poor pet!”

“Hush!—hush!—be brave, and you’ll get better; but don’t talk now, you must be very quiet.”

Only one word of that sentence seemed to ring on the sick man’s ear, and that brought the answer,

“Brave !—yes—I’m brave still, though I have been beaten—but indeed I am brave still—yes—I’m brave—brave—brave——” and then the words became inaudible, and died away in a choking, murmuring sob. That sob found an answer in a deep quivering sigh heaved by the sympathizing woman who still knelt on the bare boards by the side of that lowly suffering bed. All was silent again, her head dropped upon her hands, and she remained motionless, till the heavy steps were heard remounting the stairs ; and then the lady rose from her knees, and stood looking with painful intensity upon the features now quiet and composed as her own.

“Well, poor dear, and how has he been ?—a bit rambling, and off his head, I venture to say. He never talks sense-like two minutes together ; but the doctor says that it’ll all come in time, so we mustn’t lose heart. Come now, master, here’s a nice cup of broth—it’s beautiful—made up at the Castle. Can you hold the

cup, please, lady, whiles I lift the poor head to take it easy ?”

Well pleased was the lady to assist in that work of charity and kindness, and she was of so much use that Nurse Martin declared she had not seen any one so handy since she assisted in the hospital. Between them they arranged the tumbled bed-clothes, and laid him easier ; and then it was that Lady Lyndon shuddered to hear that the other arm, which was kept in bed, was quite shattered from a blow from a bludgeon.”

“The wonder is, poor dear, how he’s alive to tell it—or, rather, to bear it, for he don’t take to telling much now. I wish though he’d a better bed, for this gets all so hard, and I can’t manage with it at all.”

“Oh ! you shall have a spring one in to-morrow ; and a man shall come from Middleborough to take orders of you for anything that may be wanted. Do not mind ordering everything that can make him comfortable.”

The dame turned round abruptly, looked at the lady, who had removed her veil, and dropped a short curtsey, with—

“Thank you kindly, lady. But won’t all that take a heap of money?”

“Well, and if it does? What’s the use of money but to help those that want it? Besides, Sir Vere Lyndon is rich, and will be glad to pay for everything that is ordered. There, send the bill to Lady Lyndon, that is his mother, and she will settle all—that is her direction,” and Lady Lyndon hastily wrote her name and address on one of her cards, and gave it to Mrs. Martin, who received it with a wondering curtsey. “And now, good-bye, my good friend.” And, tendering her hand to the old woman, walked quickly down the stairs and out of the house.

Nurse Martin looked out of the window of the sick-chamber with a long, scrutinizing gaze, after the receding figure of the lady as she walked briskly away, and was soon lost sight

of in the evening mist, which was now gathering slowly, and threatening to cut the short evening still shorter.

“Well, you’re a nice lady, or *no* lady, whichever you may be. I should say you *was* a lady by your words and ways. But then you’re over plain dressed for any lady as ever I’ve known as such. P’raps she’s the lady’s lady, sent to see all about poor Master Miles, and told t’ offer all as might be wanted. Well, I’m sure it’s highly considerate of her ladyship, and the young gentleman, her son, as was hurt, and would have been worse used but for he. I say, Master Woodhouse, dear,” said the old woman, suddenly walking up to her patient, seeing he was restless and wakeful, “can ’e tell me about that lady as came just now? Did’s’t know anything about her? She came from my Lady Lyndon, she say, to see ye.”

“Lyndon!—Lyndon!” repeated the man, wearily, in a low voice, roused for a moment to comprehension—“yes, he came out with us—they had him down—I mind now.”

“And the lady, his mother?”

“No—I never saw hêr.” And then the voice failed, and so did the memory.

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY LYNDON walked rapidly on, taking little notice of any objects she might see on the road. Her thoughts were busy, and moved rapidly also. She was recalling long-past times in the years that were gone, and marvelling at the strange events and changes they had brought about. And then they reverted to the scene in the humble dwelling she had just left, and tears sprang to her eyes as she dwelt on the sad state of the sorely wounded man there as she thought—

“He did not know me. I was sure he would not, even had he been better; and yet my voice seemed to recall the past to his imagination, as if heard in a dream. Well, it is best as it is.

He shall want for nothing that money can purchase ; but he shall never know whence it comes. I must see that child some day ; but better not go there again, unless—unless—— Well, I will settle nothing now. I must remember my own children, and what may be best for them—*that* must be the one object of my life.”

The lady’s reverie was suddenly dissipated by the sound of laughter and merry voices near ; and turning her head, she saw they came from a group of people who were just issuing from a pretty cottage *orné* that stood in a little garden not very far distant from the Castle domains, which she was quickly approaching.

It was getting dusk ; but as she had removed her thick veil she soon recognized Miss Ainslie and her three pupils with the Italian girl, and saw her own daughter was of the party also, and close by her side walked Lord Tudor. As Lady Lyndon stopped, not altogether satisfied with what she saw, she was immediately recog-

nized by Clare, who came quickly up to her, saying—

“Oh! mamma, have you been walking all alone? How I wish you had come with us—we have had such a pleasant afternoon!”

“How naughty of you, dear Lady Lyndon, to have slipped away,” said Lady Mildred. “We have been drinking tea with Mrs. Chambers; and she would have been so honoured if you had come too.”

“She was mamma’s nurse,” explained the little Lady Laura, who was some years younger than her sisters. “And papa gave her this pretty cottage; and Uncle Ferdinand goes to see her because she was his nurse too.”

“Yes,” said Evelyn. “It seems very odd, but Nurse Chambers remembers Uncle Ferdinand a baby as well as mamma.”

“There are some people,” observed Mildred in a musing tone, “that one never can fancy being very young—quite children, and still less babies.”

“I daresay it is difficult to you young people,”

replied Lady Lyndon, "but when you have lived a few years longer you may see more surprising changes even than that."

Lord Tudor had drawn a little back whilst these explanations were making by his nieces. He had been showing something to Clare that the old woman had just given him—a delicate pair of muffetees of her own knitting. He liked to watch the sweet kindly smile she bestowed on that little humble offering of affection ; but she said very little, only—

"I like such presents as these."

"And so do I," said the man of the world, who could command most of the things it contained ; but as he was not a sentimental person, he added no more ; and Clare was pleased with the good feeling she attributed to him, thinking it particularly meritorious in a man of his age and position to value his old nurse's little homely offerings.

Lady Lyndon then turned quickly round to look for her daughter, from whom she had been

separated by the three girls crowding round, and who still continued to expatiate on the pleasure of a tea-drinking at the old nurse's, especially when it happened that Uncle Ferdinand joined the party. He saw in a moment that Lady Lyndon would have been better pleased if he had not made one on that occasion; so, by way of re-assuring her, he observed with a smile—

“I was too late for the tea, which seems to have been very successful, for Miss Ainslie never invited me to join her party; but looking in, on my way home this evening, to pay my devoirs to old nurse, I was lucky enough to find she was holding a kettle-drum of unusual brilliancy; and, though I found the good lady's cakes had become cold, I was happy that her welcome was by no means so.”

“Oh! it was such a nice tea, Uncle Ferdinand!—it was such a pity you did not come sooner,” said Laura.

“I am quite aware I lost a great deal, and you still more, Lady Lyndon, if it was your

intention to join the tea-party when we met you at the gate."

"Oh! no; I knew nothing about it, and have been for a walk, and am now rather in a hurry to get back. I seem to have left my son a long time to himself."

And then Lord Tudor made kind inquiries as to the state of the invalid; and Lady Lyndon found herself answering him in the same spirit, and by degrees talking comfortably, almost confidentially, to him about Vere, whilst Clare walked quietly on the other side of her mother, joining from time to time in the conversation.

In less than half an hour the whole party reached home, when Miss Ainslie and her pupils went one way, and Lady Lyndon and Clare took theirs, leaving Lord Tudor to muse, or amuse himself as he might be best inclined. It was very plain to him that Lady Lyndon was in no hurry to part with her daughter, let it be ever so advantageously; and this reticence on her part pleased his fastidious taste, for he saw it was perfectly genuine. He had been so ac-

customed to be met half-way in any demonstration of the same kind, that it was an agreeable novelty to find that, if he was in earnest, he must strive for the prize. That led to the self-inquiry whether he *was* in earnest, and the answer was that he believed himself to be thoroughly so. Clare Lyndon realised his idea of all that a woman ought to be as his wife, and as he had for some little time been debating on the necessity of choosing one, he was glad that the difficulty would be so happily solved in selecting her to fill the envied place. Thus, then, he determined to enter the lists, but to proceed cautiously, first gaining the mother to his side, and then hoping to enjoy the exquisite pleasure of awakening (as he supposed) a new and tenderer feeling in that young innocent heart than it had ever entertained before. His only confidant in the matter was his sister, of whose concurrence and approval he was fully assured, and from whom he had the satisfaction of hearing that she had ascertained, in a casual manner from Lady Lyndon, that her daughter

had never as yet received any offer, and had lived so retired a life that nothing had ever been presented to her imagination in the way of love or matrimony. Lady Fullerton added that it was her own conviction that Clare was a perfect novice in all affairs of the heart, and had not as yet ascertained that she possessed one. She seemed, too, to have no idea of flirting, and fully merited the title bestowed upon her of the "Iced Snowdrop." Nothing could have suited the intended lover's ideas better; and as fate had so kindly thrown this priceless gem in his way, he resolved to lose no time in endeavouring to secure it as his own. He was, however, aware that he must proceed with circumspection, and not risk his chance by overhaste. He felt very thankful to the accident which promised to detain the whole family for some weeks at his sister's house; and as the occupation he had laid out for himself was a very pleasant one, and, in its earnestness of intention, had all the charm of novelty, he had no wish to shorten the time that must elapse

ere he could declare his intentions to the object of them. He had no misgivings as to his ultimate success.

The first step Lord Tudor took was quietly, but persistently, to ingratiate himself with Clare's mother; and she responded cautiously, but not unkindly.

Lady Lyndon, ever watchfully observant, saw at once the real object of these attentions. It produced a strange flurry in her mind—a sort of perturbation of spirits that was almost distressing. She perceived, then, that Lord Tudor was in earnest; it was no idle admiration of her beautiful Clare, designed to fill up his idle hours, but induced by a steady purpose to woo and win her as his wife. She felt that before long he would ask her to give him her daughter—and what would be the answer? All this time she did not ask herself whether Clare would accept Lord Tudor; but should she, her mother, accept him as Clare's husband? That gentle girl had never yet refused to do her mother's bidding, so in this most important

event of her life she considered the decision rested principally with herself.

It may be said in Lady Lyndon's excuse (though she little dreamt she needed any) that Clare seemed to like Lord Tudor's society and conversation; it was just such a calm liking and regard as might be encouraged and cherished into a deeper feeling in a disengaged heart; and Lady Lyndon considered such a degree of preference was all that was required, on a woman's part, before the decisive question had been put.

She therefore left the further consideration of Clare's feelings to time, and exerted herself to learn as much as possible of Lord Tudor and his antecedents both from himself, and from others better qualified perhaps to inform her. The chief person on whom she relied for information was her friend Miss Ainslie, who from her early acquaintance might be able to speak of his lordship as he appeared to those who knew him then, and had had frequent opportunities of seeing and hearing of him since.

Of course the good governess's report was all that was satisfactory, for he had been kind to her, and hers, in their time of need ; and of Lord Tudor's inner life, or life in general, she had but little means of judging. Still there were no glaring errors to record ; it was a smooth life altogether—one of perfect ease and self-indulgence. He was prosperous, and all spoke well of him. His position and fortune were all that could be desired, and the disparity of years might be an advantage to a girl so young and inexperienced in all worldly ways as Clare Lyndon. It is very true that she herself never for a moment thought of Lord Tudor as a lover. In the little instances of partiality he might evince towards her, she was more inclined to look upon them and him as his nieces might have done, had he testified the same towards them. It was part of the result of the peculiar manner in which Clare had been brought up, and the absence of all confidential intercourse between her mother and herself, that the idea of love and lovers had

occupied so small a portion of her thoughts.

Thus it was that Lady Lyndon considered herself at full liberty to dispose of her daughter, as well as direct her tenderest affections. Still the responsibility weighed deeply on her mind. And now she saw the time was approaching when she should be called upon to decide her future fate. She almost trembled lest she should err on so important a point; besides, she dreaded the idea of a separation from the child she had ruled so absolutely, and yet loved so dearly. The lady was a very lonely woman, notwithstanding her pleasant position in the world; and when her children should go from her, who was there left to her? She felt that time was fast approaching as regarded them both, and she had pledged herself that no personal consideration should deter her from aiding in settling them as advantageously as lay in her power, when the opportunity should offer.

It never occurred to her to take Clare into

her confidence and lay all her perplexities before her, or to consult her in any way. But as Lord Tudor's intentions and attentions became more marked, and the day of decision seemed to approach nearer and nearer, she would sometimes put out a feeler, as it were, to sound Clare's state of mind on the subject, taking special care, at the same time, to avoid anything explicit on the subject.

One day when she and Clare were taking a walk, and in no fear of interruption, she said,

"What a long visit Lord Tudor seems to be making here."

Clare laughed, as she replied,

"Not nearly so long as ours, mamma; we came here before him, and for all I know we may remain after him."

"Why do you imagine that, Clare? Has Lord Tudor said anything to you about going away?"

"To me! Oh, no, mamma. Only I just thought it might be possible, as both Constance

and Audrey say he is in such great request he never stays very long anywhere."

"Then it is the greater compliment his remaining so long at this time."

"I suppose this is a sort of home to Lord Tudor, so he would not think about its being complimentary. Nor would his own people; it is natural he should like being with them, instead of in a great large dull house, all by himself."

"He need not be in a great house all alone, unless he prefers it," said Lady Lyndon, rather stiffly.

"No, I suppose he can always ask plenty of people to stay with him."

"I was not thinking of strangers, or even friends, but of a more permanent companion," replied her mother.

"Oh! are you thinking of a wife for Lord Tudor, mamma? Well, I suppose, with all his advantages of various sorts he would have no difficulty in finding one. But as he has lived so

many, many years without one, I daresay he would not care for one."

"That does not follow at all, Clare. He may never as yet have seen the sort of person he could prefer, but he may meet with some one still."

"Oh! yes, mamma, of course he may; he does not look at all old, and some people I know were not by any means young when they married. There is that nice good old Mr. and Mrs. Welby."

"That is not at all a case in point, Clare," said Lady Lyndon, for the first time in her life thinking her daughter rather obtuse, and yet fearing to enlighten her too much, before things were more definitely defined by the gentleman himself.

After that last remark the mother and daughter walked on some time in silence. Lady Lyndon, on looking into her daughter's face, observed such a thoughtful and preoccupied look, that she could not help thinking that at last Clare was turning over what had been said in regard to Lord Tudor, and perhaps beginning

to draw certain conclusions. Clare started as she looked up and saw her mother's questioning glance bent upon her; and then, as if in answer to it, said, in a low timid voice,

"Mamma, dear, were not you very young when you married poor papa?"

Lady Lyndon almost started in her turn at finding herself the object of her child's thoughts and speculations. It was so seldom that Clare ventured to explore the recesses of her mother's mind. After a little pause, in which Lady Lyndon appeared to be collecting her thoughts, she answered, somewhat indifferently,

"Yes, I was only eighteen—two years younger than you, Clare."

"Were not your father and mother very sorry to part with you so soon, mamma?"

Lady Lyndon cast a hurried, searching glance over her daughter's face, as if seeking to know what had prompted an inquiry on a subject so new to them both; but seeing nothing—as Clare's eyes were bent on the ground—but an earnest composure, the lady answered,

"I had neither of those relations to lament or rejoice on the occasion, as I should think you must have known by this time, from the absence of grand-parents on my side, as well as on your father's. I married from a foreign school, where I had been placed by my aunt, Miss Smyth, under whose care I was then."

"And is she dead too, mamma?"

"Long ago, Clare."

"Poor dear mamma, how you must have suffered, losing all your relations! Were not you very unhappy?"

"Not after I married your father, Clare."

"Where did you live before you went to school, mamma."

"In various places, Clare. What makes you ask so many questions to-day?"

"I hardly know, mamma. I think it must be that Audrey took to asking me things I had never thought of before."

"What things?" said Lady Lyndon sharply.

"Oh! whether I had many relations; and I told her only old Mrs. Montague, that I ever

heard of. And then she asked about yours, mamma."

"Well, what did you say?"

"That I had never heard you mention any. Was I not right, mamma?"

"Yes, we are very much alone in the world, Clare. Now we will talk of something else."

CHAPTER IX.

TIME crept slowly on at the Castle. Vere Lyndon got better at last, and was allowed to move into another room, and see his friends once more. He still felt very much below the conversational mark, especially as regarded his first interview with Audrey. He rather dreaded being exposed to the full fire of her lively conversation and remarks, and was painfully conscious of his own dulness and inability to cope with her.

They met for the first time alone, and Vere was as much pleased as surprised to find Audrey's high spirits were entirely subdued on that occasion, and her manner as quiet as Lady Lyndon herself might desire. She seemed really

moved at the sight of the alteration which three weeks' violent pain and fever had brought about; and there was something quite touching in the tone of her voice when she briefly expressed her pleasure at his recovery, and restoration to the society of his friends. There was no acting in the case. Audrey was really shocked and surprised to see how very ill Vere Lyndon was still looking. His naturally sallow complexion appeared almost livid; his large dark eyes more deeply sunk, and his attenuated frame told how seriously ill he had been.

"We had no idea how very, very ill you have been, Sir Vere," said Audrey, with a quivering lip, and in so gentle a tone that the young man's heart was moved towards her, as it had never been in all their former days of gay companionship.

"I fear I am hardly presentable yet," said Sir Vere, retaining the hand she had held out to him; "but I am very, very glad to see you, though I almost dreaded the effect of my scarecrow appearance upon you."

"I do not wonder that Lady Lyndon insisted on keeping us all at a distance," observed Audrey, after a moment's pause, still standing by his chair, and not withdrawing the hand clasped in his attenuated fingers.

"And did you really wish to see me before?" asked the young man, in a low, gentle tone, looking up in the pitying face that gazed down so kindly upon him.

"Indeed I did," said Audrey, very simply, almost in a whisper; and then, as she felt her hand more closely clasped, she asked, "And you?—did you never ask to see me?"

There was a pause. Sir Vere remembered well. He had thought almost with dread of seeing Lady Audrey gay, brilliant, and lively, as he had ever found her; and now, how changed was she!—how changed himself! But there was the old admiration springing up again, with a far deeper, tenderer feeling towards the gentle sympathising girl who now stood beside him.

Vere Lyndon was truth itself—he was some-

times almost rude and blunt in consequence, and had offended friends because he was by nature so plain-spoken. He did not mean to hurt or offend, but he *could* not say the thing he did not feel, and lacked the tact or talent to conceal his sentiments. In the present case he could not, and would not, dissemble with Audrey, so after a moment's silence he answered,

“No, Audrey, dear Audrey, I did *not*. I cannot account for my feeling then. I can only tell you now that I never knew how dearly I loved you till this moment.”

Audrey was silent in her turn, but she was not displeased, for instead of standing, she was kneeling by his chair, supporting her head upon her hands, which were clasped together and resting there, whilst Vere Lyndon's arm stole round her waist, and drew her nearer to himself.

“You are not angry with me, Audrey?” he asked at last, as she continued silent.

“Oh! Vere, are you sure that you know your

own feelings now," was the reply, in a tremulous whisper.

Many words were not needed on Vere Lyndon's part to give the requisite assurance. Whatever was the nature of the arguments he employed, it seems they were eminently successful, as, before Lady Audrey Hampden left that room, she was the betrothed wife of Sir Vere Lyndon. It all passed very quickly—the all-important words had been spoken that were to bind them together as long as life lasted, and neither of them had in any way expected such a result to their meeting that day. It was done, and Vere Lyndon felt a strange calm steal over his enfeebled frame. There was no tumult in his feelings. A deep, engrossing love for Audrey Hampden had suddenly taken entire possession of his heart—to live or die for her, and her alone, was the vow he registered in his heart as he received the assurance of her own attachment; and there was calm and peace in the depth and intensity of the feeling.

It was strange, too; he loved Audrey so entirely for the display of qualities all at variance with her natural character and disposition. He had been at first attracted by her liveliness, and had admired her graceful self-possession, and felt grateful for the preference she had so often displayed towards himself. But if he had fallen unwillingly in love then, he was hardly aware of it. He felt more tenderly towards the brilliant girl when she failed and faltered in her acting, and far more inclined to love her then, when for the first time he saw her lose something of her usual courage and self-confidence, and turn to him almost timidly for such help as he could give under the difficulties of her new position. But it was reserved for that first eventful meeting after his illness for Audrey to touch the exact chord that produced such wonderful harmony in his heart, and bound it for weal or woe to her own for ever.

She, too, was hardly less content than Vere himself. It was no worldly satisfaction, then, that filled her heart with such unwonted

thoughts of tenderness and love. She was, in fact, surprised to find how entirely it responded to all he uttered in that happy hour in which he confessed his own love, and asked for hers in return. Perhaps she had loved him all along more than she had suspected ; or her own love, like his, had sprung suddenly into existence under such novel circumstances. Still it could hardly have attained such full-grown proportions, had there not been a very considerable predisposition towards such a feeling on either side. The depth and reality of Audrey's sentiments on the occasion were evinced by her rushing away to her own room, on leaving that of her lover, and shutting herself up to enjoy the luxury of living over again that blissful hour, of repeating to herself all Vere's words of tenderness, and thinking over her own replies to him, fearing all the while to be interrupted, and yet longing to be with him again, and at the same time half shrinking from bringing others around to see and share her newly-found happiness, or desecrate it by such worldly thoughts and considerations

as she knew were sure to follow as soon as her engagement should be publicly announced.

Sir Vere was in the meantime left alone to make the communication to his mother. He was not sorry to do this without a witness. So he would not detain Audrey, when, on hearing an approaching step in the direction of his room, she rose up in a hurry and declared she could not encounter Lady Lyndon till Vere had "told her all about it," never doubting for a moment, as she said so, that the tale he had to relate would be a pleasant one to his mother. Still she did not care to be present at the revelation. Vere, on his part, was equally sure, from what his mother had already said or intimated in regard to Audrey, that she would be welcome as a daughter-in-law. Yet he had sundry misgivings, born of the little confidence that had ever existed between Lady Lyndon and her children, and which made him slightly apprehensive of the manner in which she might take the first communication of his intentions. But he was

altogether too really happy to have any actual forebodings of evil.

When Lady Lyndon went into her son's room, which was not till after some little time had elapsed, she looked fagged and wearied, and as if returned from a long walk. She sat down and took off her bonnet and gloves slowly and without speaking, and almost started when her son addressed her.

"You look tired, mother; you should not walk so far."

"How do you know how far I have walked?" asked the lady coldly. Vere did not answer, for his thoughts were elsewhere; and whilst he was considering how best to introduce the subject nearest his heart, his mother spoke again. "If you wish to know where I have been, Vere, I may as well tell you; I have been to the keeper's house, to see that poor man, who was so severely injured in trying to save you."

"Ah—Woodhouse, yes, I remember, poor fellow! I am very sorry he got so punished on my account; we must do something for him, or

rather I daresay *you* will—eh, mother ? And how did you find him ?”

“ Out of danger, and altogether better, but, I fear not likely to be of much use for some time to come ; so he says he shall not remain here. Yes, Vere, we must try and make it up to him, and do what we can.”

“ I am sure you will, mother ; but you must not let him hang about upon you, under pretext of having helped me at a pinch. If the man finds out how very charitably you are inclined, I have my doubts that it will not serve to make him recover the more speedily !”

“ And if he finds out how very charitably you are likely to judge his actions and motives, I do not think there is much fear of his being beholden either to your bounty or to mine,” replied the lady, with a glance of contempt.

“ Well, mother, I meant no harm, and know nothing of the man ; I spoke at random.”

“ Yes, like the madman that flings about fire and says it is in sport,” replied Lady Lyndon, whose memory was tenacious in regard to the

"So did I fancy once, but I find I made a grievous mistake. I love Audrey Hampden with my whole heart and soul!"

"And she?—does she care for you, Vere Lyndon, or does she wish to reign at Lyndon Court?"

Vere dropped his mother's hand, and slowly turned round and went back to his former seat, only saying in a low voice—

"She says she loves me, and I believe her."

Lady Lyndon dropped into the chair by which she had been standing, and continued to gaze fixedly on her son's pale face; but he neither avoided nor returned the look, he seemed to be slowly revolving some question in his own mind, and thus the mother and son sat in silence for some minutes. At last Lady Lyndon broke it by saying in her natural tone,

"You can hardly wonder that your communication has taken me by surprise, Vere; for you seemed so utterly indifferent about Lady Audrey, that it was hardly possible for me to believe that under such studied reserve

you were thinking of her as your future wife; so you must forgive me, as I am a very matter-of-fact person, for not understanding such an extraordinary change of opinion, or else concealment of it all, in a moment of time."

Vere Lyndon, who was, like his mother, rather plain and practical in his words and actions, saw at once she had reason on her side. So he hastened to tell her all he knew of the change in himself, and how much cause he had to be charmed with Audrey's feeling and sympathy, and dwelt upon everything that was delightful and amiable in and about her; he spoke as a son to a mother, and in so doing acted wisely, as well as felt properly; and the speech, such as it was, told well for both, and he had the satisfaction of seeing that his mother's beautiful brow relaxed in its severe aspect, and she listened seriously and attentively to all he advanced on the subject; and at the close he asked,

"And now I have told you all, mother, about my apparent inconsistency of feeling and pur-

pose, which perhaps surprises me as much as it does you; but I am true and sincere in all I tell you, and all I have told Audrey too, so now I hope, mother, you will love her and welcome her as your future daughter, and my wife?"

Lady Lyndon got up and crossed the little space that divided them, and in her turn kissed her son, saying,

"I once told you, Vere, I gave my consent to your asking Lady Audrey to become your wife, and you did not then seem inclined to profit by it; but although you have changed since, there is no reason why I should change also. I know nothing against Lady Audrey—there is every worldly consideration in favour of her becoming your wife. So whether *I* individually like it more or less, is nothing to the purpose; but, what is far more important, I think and believe it is a connexion your father would have approved, so I must approve also."

"I am glad of that, mother," said Vere, with less effusion of feeling than might have been expected, but with perfect sincerity of tone; and

then he added, "Perhaps you will kindly go to her, and express all you have said as to liking and approving? It will, I am sure, be a gratification to her, as it must be also to me."

Lady Lyndon made no reply, but she gathered up her shawl and other walking things, which lay scattered beside her, seemingly too busy to speak. At last, having completed her operations, she turned to her son, and said, as she was about leaving his room,

"You must permit me to choose my own time for seeing Lady Audrey, as well as the terms in which to express my own ideas on this (to me) very important subject. At present I am not equal to the undertaking. I require some rest, both of body and mind, before I can enter upon it." And then the lady vanished.

CHAPTER X.

BY that time the next day, however, Lady Audrey Hampden had been received as her future daughter-in-law by Lady Lyndon, and Sir Vere Lyndon had also been graciously accepted as her future husband, with the full consent and approval of all her family. The lovers themselves were very happy, and the announcement of their engagement seemed the cause of much joy throughout the whole establishment. The younger part of it looked forward with delight to the gaiety of a wedding in prospect. Mildred especially, who hoped to make her *début* on that occasion. The marriage of the first daughter is always a subject of peculiar interest in every family, and that of

Lady Audrey Hampden was not likely to be any exception to the general rule. She was herself almost astonished at the feelings which seemed to have sprung into existence so suddenly, and to have opened out to her such new interests in life. It seemed strange, too, the attachment she had inspired in one who had hitherto appeared so unimpressible as Sir Vere Lyndon; but it was very pleasant to be so loved and cared for, and also to have become an object of such general interest to all her family and friends. Those early days of her engagement dawned upon her with all that was most promising, both as regarded present and future happiness.

Nor was Vere Lyndon less contented with his new position; and every succeeding day seemed to increase the strength of his attachment, and the power that Audrey possessed over him. From the moment she had promised to become his wife, every hope and every affection of his heart centred in her. She became the one ruling, governing passion of his ex-

istence, and he loved her with all the natural intensity of his nature. The very fact that he had never loved before, and had been slow to do so in the present instance, only seemed to render him more entirely devoted to the girl who had owned her affection for himself.

Audrey behaved very charmingly under the circumstances. There was a mixture of frankness and tenderness, with a little touch of sparkling fun, that made her very bewitching to her lover. She left him in no doubt as to her own sentiments; and yet the playfulness with which her confessions were often made, seemed only to render them more piquant and delightful.

Vere became a much pleasanter character himself under such softening influences. No one had ever seemed to love him very much before that time; and his own affections were naturally deep and tender. With his father he had never been a favourite, and still less so after his brother's death. He never doubted his mother's affection *as a mother* for him; but it

was too cold and undemonstrative to satisfy his craving in early life for love. Clare was a very dear sister to him, but ever calm, and showing but little of the deep affection she felt for her only brother.

It was indeed a new life to the young man to feel he was the object of a love so devoted as that of Lady Audrey. The knowledge of *that* did him good in every way—it ennobled and purified his whole nature, for it is a depressing fact to feel that no one loves or cares peculiarly for you ; so, to be the object of a very tender regard to another, raises a person not only in his own estimation, but inspires him with the desire of becoming worthy of so much love ; and thus it was with Vere Lyndon.

In a few days after the declaration had been made, Sir Vere was sufficiently recovered to take long, delightful drives, with Audrey as his companion ; and the good effect of all these happy influences was soon visible in his appearance of restored health and strength. It was then Lady Lyndon began to talk again of her

departure, which had been postponed a short time in consequence of late events. It was early days to talk of anything definite in regard to the prospective marriage, or financial arrangements consequent thereon. But as soon as Lady Lyndon had fixed an early day for her departure, so soon did her son begin to plead for something definite as to time; and after a little demur and hesitation, Lady Fullerton, in accordance with a long, pre-conceived arrangement in her own mind, gave Sir Vere the welcome intimation that he might claim his bride early in the commencement of the new year.

It was then that Lady Lyndon seemed to think it incumbent on her to speak openly in regard to her son's future prospects. She did it with the same calm and unmoved air that characterised all her communications, saying, rather briefly, to the parents of the bride elect,

“You are possibly aware that Vere's father left all the family property in my charge, and I hope to make such arrangements as I think he

would have wished, and as you may approve for your daughter."

"We have no doubt," replied Lady Fullerton, who was the chief speaker, "that you will do everything that is kind and right by the young people; but of course we feel it necessary that our dear Audrey should have secured to her in her new position, the full enjoyment of everything suitable to that in which she has been brought up; and really the poor child has not the slightest idea of anything like management or economy—in fact, I need not say more to you, dear Lady Lyndon, who know so well *how* she has been brought up, and the sort of home to which she has been accustomed all her life."

Lady Lyndon smiled coldly, and then replied, guardedly,

"I hope she will feel no loss of luxuries, or such pleasant surroundings as she has been used to from her birth, in the home to which my son will take her. *That* home, I hope, will be at Lyndon Court, which will *eventually* be my son's. I say *eventually*, because Vere will of course suc-

ceed to all I hold at my death. In the meantime, as I consider myself responsible for carrying out his father's wishes and intentions, I shall retain the actual possession of the estates, till I see how far I should be justified in making over a certain portion into his hands. At present I do not consider it would be well to surrender them entirely to him; and your daughter, you say, is totally ignorant of all species of management and economy. I therefore propose that my son and his wife shall make their principal home with me at the Court, understanding that I still retain the place as my own. I do not think they will have occasion to feel that I am any *gêne* to them; and I also intend settling upon Vere such an allowance as will enable him at any time to make another home, at the pleasure of himself and Lady Audrey."

Lord and Lady Fullerton acquiesced graciously in these propositions. They were not such as they could entirely have desired, and yet there was too much promise of good in

them to be actually declined. Besides, they liked the match altogether, and approved of Sir Vere in every way; and it was plain that Audrey was very much in love, and would be very unhappy were any obstacles to be made at the eleventh hour. Both the parents were aware, too, that differences often arise in the discussion of settlements, which, without setting the intended marriage aside, yet create a feeling between the respective families which can never be overcome in after-days, and bring forth very unpleasant results on both sides in consequence. So, though they were both a little disappointed, they saw sufficient cause for future rejoicing in their daughter's prospects, to accept Lady Lyndon's communication in the end with tolerable satisfaction.

That lady seemed to care very little for their opinion of the matter—in fact, she believed the whole thing was so advantageous to their daughter, that she probably did not suspect there would be two opinions on the subject. She therefore received their murmured words of

comprehension and assent with great composure, only observing,

“Perhaps I should not omit to mention there is a slight contingency in favour of my son’s becoming possessed of the family property before my death, and that is, in case of my contracting any second marriage; but as that is quite out of the question, it is hardly worth mentioning.”

The lady said this with an air of such sincerity and conviction, that Lady Fullerton feared there was no hope of such a contingency occurring. But her lord had a theory of his own that every woman (maid or widow) might be wooed and won, if the right person appeared. He saw no reason, therefore, why the beautiful widow should prove the exception. He had no fortune to give his daughter during his life, for he was not a very rich man. Though possessed of a fine estate and property, still it was rigidly entailed, and he had an expensive establishment, and lived fully up to his means. So he wisely took things as they were, and only

wished Lady Lyndon might follow her son's example with all speed.

In the meantime neither he nor Lady Fullerton doubted but that Audrey would be able to hold her own and make herself as much at home at Lyndon Court as the rightful lady herself. They had, too, every reason to be satisfied with the handsome sum Lady Lyndon proposed settling on her son, with a very liberal amount of pin-money to his wife's separate use. So, altogether, things were pretty satisfactory in all respects.

There was one person, very deeply concerned in the matter, to whom these terms were more than satisfactory—they seemed quite munificent—and that was Sir Vere Lyndon himself. He thanked his mother warmly for all she had done, and intended to do, in favour of himself and his wife. He had always been sincere in what he had said as to his inheritance, and knew that his father never desired to see him take the place of his lost darling, to whose untimely fate he had himself been so unfortunately acces-

sory. He felt, then, that his mother was doing all in her power for him, without appearing to cast a reproach upon his father's disposition of affairs. Vere never for a moment suspected his mother of being actuated by that love of power which was in truth a strong ingredient in her peculiar character. If indeed she had mixed feelings and motives in what she was doing, she was hardly aware of the fact, though she would have been ready enough to declare that singleness of action and design is a rare quality. Vere Lyndon, however, fully accredited his mother with it.

There was also another very deeply interested spectator in all that was transpiring at Hampden Castle at that time, and in the anticipated alliance between the families of Hampden and Lyndon, and that was Lord Tudor. He remained at the Castle, looked on, and, moreover, signified his perfect approval, to his sister, when the subject was first mooted: "It will bring Clare a little nearer to you, at all events," said she with a smile; adding, "for you seem to be

a long time coming to the point, and now the mother and daughter intend going away very shortly."

"Yes, I know; but I am in no hurry. I am still on very debatable ground."

"Do you mean, then, Ferdinand, that you are getting tired of the whole thing? Oh, how like you that is!"

"Then I am not at all like myself in the present instance; for I am not in the least tired, but I doubt if Clare Lyndon would have me if I proposed to-morrow."

"That is because you do not let her see how much you like her. Anyone would think it was the mother instead of the daughter you preferred."

"Indeed! That just shews how very erroneously people in general pass judgment on their neighbours' actions and intentions; and yet, after all, I *may* possibly propose to Lady Lyndon herself?"

"But not *for* herself?"

"No, but for her daughter. The mother is

not much to my taste, and would not have been so, twenty years ago, in spite of her peerless beauty."

"And yet, I cannot see that there is anything objectionable about her. Really, Ferdinand, you are too fastidious."

"Perhaps I am; but it is my misfortune, not my fault, that I see too clearly through people, as it were. I often wish I did not."

"Well! I have never found transparency of character or disposition so common a trait, amongst my friends and acquaintances."

"No," replied Lord Tudor, with a short laugh, "they do not willingly display the rough side, or the wrong side, but it is my misfortune, nevertheless, to recognize its existence, in spite of the smooth covering. Now in Lady Lyndon there is a something of style and manner (quiet and ladylike as she always appears), and even turn of thoughts and ideas, which irresistibly impresses me with the notion that, in spite of all her beauty and *savoir faire*, she was not born in the purple."

“Well, possibly not; one would have heard more of her had she been so, and it has often struck me that it is even as you say; but as I have ascertained that she is guiltless of relations of any kind or degree, there is nothing of that sort to cause apprehension, either on account of son or daughter.”

“No, I think neither you nor I need have any fears of a mesalliance in connecting ourselves with the Lyndons of Lyndon Court.”

The brother and sister sat silent for a short time, both apparently absorbed in their own reflections. At length Lady Fullerton said,

“What is it in Lady Lyndon that gives you the idea of her as not being one of us?”

“Well, trifles light as air, perhaps impossible to detail, and impalpable to general perception, and which few but myself would be able to detect; but I have seen a good deal of her ladyship of late, and even studied her, whilst she has been resting in the conviction that she was studying me—as no doubt she has done to a certain degree, because it pleased me to let her

see into certain phases of my mood and mind; and she is quite aware of my predilection for her charming daughter, sweet, natural, unaffected girl! that she is; as unlike her mother as if she were no relation at all."

"I do not think Lady Lyndon is the least affected, if you mean to contrast the mother and daughter in that respect."

"No. I did not intend any comparison that way; but I consider Lady Lyndon a remarkably cautious, wary, almost suspicious person—ever seeking some *arrière pensée* in the people she meets with, seemingly as if she felt she was not exactly on a par, in some respects, with the world in which her lot is cast; and now she is called upon to mingle more extensively in it than she has ever done before, she thinks by careful study to find out the various habits and modes of thinking, as well as latent qualities, of each mind that comes into contact with her own."

"I should not have given Lady Lyndon credit for such deeply penetrating powers. Nor can I see (with all due deference to you,

Ferdinand) how the poor lady would betray want of truth and breeding in quietly making such observations on her new friends ; it is rather in your own way."

"Not at all ; our ways and our views are totally diverse. She inquires for her own purposes—I do not pretend to say what they may be, aimless and harmless, possibly—yet she has a restless desire to penetrate beneath the surface of character, suspecting or expecting often, no doubt, to find a depth that exists only in her imagination. Whilst I, too well versed, perhaps, in the history of the human mind, and seeing unwillingly through all the tinsel and trappings of society and civilization, am compelled to see much in others that I would rather ignore."

"Do you know, Ferdinand, that it has often struck me that Lady Lyndon is a remarkably independent person, and often gives her opinion perfectly regardless of that of the person she is talking to," said Lady Fullerton, in a musing tone.

· “Exactly so,” answered her brother. “She does not care much for other people’s opinions, and her son resembles her in that respect. Still she likes to be perfectly *au fait* as to the opinions and private intentions of all whom she may in any way suspect of having an influence on either son or daughter. And now I am about to engage her ladyship in a conversation that may tend to enlighten me on a few things I desire to know.”

CHAPTER XI.

LORD TUDOR found no opportunity that day for putting his good intentions into execution. Lady Lyndon was not accessible for an interview,—at least, not without going through the form and ceremony of requesting one, and he had no wish to make his proceedings so patent to the public, or at least to some few members of it. The afternoon and evening therefore passed over without any results at all affecting the future of Clare Lyndon and Lord Tudor.

The next morning, nearly the last of Lady Lyndon's visit, was more propitious. Lord Tudor happened to be returning from a solitary ramble, or rather stroll, on the terrace, where it

was his custom to resort to smoke his after-breakfast cigar ; and passing by the drawing-room, encountered Clare, who was just leaving the room with an open letter in her hand. A few words were exchanged with her, and then they parted, for Lord Tudor saw through the open door that Lady Lyndon was alone. It had been his wish to find her thus, without preparation or apparent design on his own part, and then in the course of casual conversation to discover something as to Clare's own feelings, which might decide his own chances.

It may appear strange that he did not first seek to ascertain them from herself, but he felt he had not made sufficient way with Clare to do so as yet. If he had sought her alone, the mother would have opposed him at every turn. His only chance was through her ; she, no doubt, held her daughter's future fate in her hands. All Lord Tudor wished to ask was leave to prosecute his suit, time and opportunity to make it acceptable to Clare. Lady Lyndon was alone, sitting near a writing-table, with an

anxious, preoccupied look in her beautiful eyes. It did not seem a very favourable time to make mention of his love. But Lord Tudor was not in the habit of considering himself unwelcome at any time or season ; so, finding the lady he sought alone, he prepared to enter on the subject of his thoughts. A few preliminary sentences, and then he observed,

“I met Miss Lyndon just leaving the room ; I suppose she will accompany you home ?”

Lady Lyndon looked up with a startled glance upon this interrogation, and answered,

“It *was* my intention certainly to have taken Clare home with me ; but possibly, as you have seen her, she has told you of the alteration in our plans.”

“I only saw Miss Lyndon for two minutes, and we did not exchange half-a-dozen words, so I am quite in the dark as to any change of plan, but hope it may be one in favour of her remaining here. Sir Vere, I suppose, will be with us for some time longer ; so probably his sister has been persuaded to remain also ?”

"No, certainly not," replied Lady Lyndon, in that abrupt and rather harsh tone which Lord Tudor had heard before, and noted, in his own mind, not much to her advantage. On the present occasion, he made no other reply than a slight bow of acquiescence, waiting for further information before he spoke again on his own behalf.

Lord Tudor's expectant look and attitude, and his more expressive silence, seemed to recall Lady Lyndon to herself, and a recollection of what might be due to another; so, when she next spoke, it was in a gentler voice, and in her usual calm manner. The purport of her speech was to the effect that her daughter had that morning received a letter from an old friend and relation, Mrs. Montague (an aunt of her father's, she added), begging Clare to go and finish an interrupted visit to her, with as little delay as possible; therefore it was her intention to make a little detour, and drop Clare at the nearest station to Mrs. Montague's place, Deepwell Park, on her road home the following day. Clare

was just gone to answer Mrs. Montague's letter.

"And you do not intend accompanying your daughter yourself?" asked Lord Tudor, with sudden interest in the lady's movements.

"No, it is some years since I have been at Mrs. Montague's; in fact, we are not friends. I am not given, I hope, to quarrel or take offence, but she chose to feel aggrieved at the will it was my late husband's pleasure to make, and some observations were made which have prevented my visiting at Deepwell since."

It was something in Lord Tudor's favour that Lady Lyndon treated him with such unreserve as to declare the reason of the estrangement between her and Sir Montague's relative; but as family affairs were at that time necessarily no secret in the family, Lady Lyndon's communication was hardly as confidential as it might have been some weeks before. Lord Tudor, feeling he was called upon to make some observation, merely said,

"But you allow your daughter to visit her?"

"Yes, I have no wish that the ill-feeling should extend beyond myself. I do not think Sir Vere has any great love for his great-aunt, nor does she particularly like him, I fancy. She is, however, extremely partial to Clare, who I am told is very like the only daughter she ever had, and lost about the same age. Mrs. Montague has never been out at all since that event took place. She has very few neighbours, and not liking the greater part of them, the old lady lives a very solitary life in her fine old place."

"No wonder she craves the pleasure of Miss Lyndon's society and companionship; but it must be very dull for her staying there," said Lord Tudor, with genuine feeling for Clare under the circumstances.

"I don't think she finds it particularly so, and she is attached to her old aunt, and so was her poor father before her," observed Lady Lyndon in a low tone. It was a fortunate turn the conversation had taken, and a happy softening of the lady's ungenial mood and manner, and so, in

a few brief sentences, Lord Tudor revealed the secret of his soul, and asked Lady Lyndon the gift of that one peerless daughter. He was very composed in his utterance, and very distinct in his meaning, though he was conscious of a strange fluttering of his heart, and an anxiety, which almost stopped his fluent speech. Lady Lyndon looked up with sudden apprehension on her countenance, her eyes dilated as she listened, and then, as he ended, she became pale even to the lips, whilst she made some efforts to speak before the words became audible.

"I fear you find what I have just said very unwelcome," said Lord Tudor at last, with mingled pain and resentment in his voice and manner.

"No, indeed, I am only a little startled," she answered at last, in slow measured accents."

"I am sorry to have taken you by surprise ; but really, dear Lady Lyndon, I had no wish to conceal my admiration for Miss Lyndon, you must surely have seen it ?"

He paused and looked intently at the lady; after a brief space she replied, in a low voice,

“Yes, I have.”

“Then you wish me to infer you do not approve?”

Lady Lyndon was silent for a few moments, and seemed at a loss for words in which to convey her answer, till roused by some impatient movement on the gentleman’s part, she spoke again, and this time in quieter accents.

“Pray do not mistake me, Lord Tudor. I am quite sensible of the honour you do my daughter, though I do sincerely believe her to be worthy of the deepest love of any man on earth, be his position what it may—but——”

“But *what?* Pray, dear Lady Lyndon, do not torture me by this suspense. In one word, tell me. Perhaps Miss Lyndon’s affections are already engaged, or your own wishes in regard to her are otherwise directed? Say only if it is so, and you need fear no further importunity from me.”

“Neither one nor the other, Lord Tudor,”

returned Lady Lyndon, with a slight gasp ; and then, with restored equanimity, she continued, "I can answer for Clare having never thought of love, or had any lovers hitherto, nor can I say that I have formed any plans or intentions in that way on her account."

"Then (I am answering your ominous *but*), I fear you think I may not suit her?"

"I do not think that, Lord Tudor. Indeed, I have had no time to weigh the subject in reference to herself, nor to consult her own ideas upon it. She is, I am perfectly sure, in entire ignorance as to the nature of your feelings towards her. But from what I have seen, I am inclined to think she has no objection to your lordship."

No objection ! Was it possible that *that* could be said to Lord Tudor when, for the first time in his life, he committed himself to a downright proposal ? Well, he was right so far. Lady Lyndon was occasionally very wanting in that exquisite tact which peculiarly distinguishes the highest-bred portion of humanity, and very

gauche, too, in her manner of expressing her ideas, when at all put out of her daily routine of thought and action. He remained rather indignantly silent, and waited the lady's further communications. She seemed arranging her ideas, in order to express them with befitting explicitness ; and at last gave utterance to them in a slow, deliberate tone of voice, saying,

“ When I used the word *but* it was not in form of an objection, only to express how new the subject would be to my daughter's consideration, and therefore, even in the event of your proposal being agreeable to her, it would be better to defer all mention of it at present. That is all I wished to imply, Lord Tudor.”

“ Not an absolute rejection, only a postponement,” replied the gentleman, with a half smile, his worst apprehensions being relieved, and rather amused at Lady Lyndon's somewhat tortuous mode of proceeding. She looked up, however, quite unconscious of anything remarkable in her own views, answering,

"Yes, that is it. I really could not encounter two weddings at once, so I may trust to you, Lord Tudor, to postpone all mention of your attachment to my daughter for the present."

"Let me understand, however, Lady Lyndon; have I *your* sanction? Do you approve of my proposal to your daughter?"

Lady Lyndon took a few moments to consider, and then said,

"Yes, Lord Tudor, I think you would make her happy, and I feel sure her father would not have disapproved of you as his son-in-law; and as for myself, though I shall be very sorry to part with Clare, yet there is not anyone I am acquainted with that I should prefer to yourself; but, as I said, we must have time, the subject is new to me, and though your proposal ought to be in every way gratifying to me, I hope you will be content to wait a certain time before mentioning it to Clare."

There was something disheartening in Lady Lyndon's tone and manner of treating his pro-

posal. She did not reject it, by any means ; on the contrary, Lord Tudor saw she considered it a matter of duty to entertain it, being so advantageous in a worldly point of view, but there was no heart in it. She evidently cared but little for himself, and would be glad to postpone the evil day. There was contradiction throughout. Lady Lyndon wished, and yet did not wish, to marry her daughter ; she would do it reluctantly when the time came, and yet could not in conscience allow so good an offer to escape. After that explanation there was a good deal more to be said on the subject, for Lord Tudor was in love with the daughter, though not with her mother ; indeed, he thought he should not care how little he saw of her beautiful face, after he had secured Clare as his wife, and these unamiable feelings did not tend to make the prolonged interview particularly pleasant or gratifying.

It was at last settled and understood that he was not to commence his wooing openly till

after Sir Vere's wedding. Lady Lyndon could not resist his wish to see Clare for a few days at her own home, when his sister and Lady Audrey were to make their first visit ; he said,

“ I shall not stay. I will only see that my treasure is safe, and that she does not quite forget my existence, and then I will take my departure.”

Lady Lyndon begged to assure her future son-in-law that she should have pleasure in seeing him at any time at the Court, only—not as Clare's avowed lover, till she herself had become more accustomed to the idea. Their interview was interrupted before they had absolutely quarrelled, as they might have done had they discussed the matter much longer. And whilst Lord Tudor went away, almost in a rage at Lady Lyndon's tiresome contradictions and prohibitions, she sat with renewed composure, congratulating herself that the worst was over—Lord Tudor's proposal made and accepted, and yet Clare would be all her own for

an indefinite time to come; and then she considered she had acted with excellent self-denial and wisdom in securing so fine a position for her daughter in future life, and one which her father must have entirely approved.

Meanwhile Clare, all-unsuspecting what momentous matters were being discussed in the drawing-room, ran upstairs joyfully to her own apartment, well pleased to answer her old friend's cordial invitation, by telling her she would be with her the next day. The letter was very short; but Mrs. Montague had long given up writing long ones. It only said—

“MY DEAR CHILD,

“You left me in a hurry, with half your visit unfinished. We are all right now. Quarantine duly performed, and no fear of infection for the future. You must come and cheer me with a sight of your fair young face. Tell your brother to bring you at his earliest convenience; and if he likes to remain, he will be welcome. In any way, let me see *you*, for

that is the one great pleasure in life that remains
to your affectionate old aunt,

“LYDIA MONTAGUE.”

“Dear old aunt!” thought Clare, as she sat down to write; “if mamma can but spare me to stay over Christmas, how happy we shall be!” And then she opened her desk, and wrote a few happy lines in answer, which she knew would be scarcely less welcome than herself.

It was settled, before the Lyndons left the next day, that there was to be a meeting at the Court of the two families, before Lord and Lady Fullerton went up to town in February; and the wedding was to take place the following month in London.

Sir Vere of course remained for a time at the Castle, in the full enjoyment of his happy prospects there with Audrey. Constance would have been glad to have kept Clare with her, after Lady Lyndon’s departure, had she not been engaged in a different direction; though it

is more than probable her mother would have refused Lady Constance's petition.

Lady Lyndon, in spite of her desire to penetrate beneath the surface as to the peculiar position of her friends in general, was quite unaware that her old acquaintance, Barry Denbigh, had quitted the Castle, bearing with him a certain portion of poor Lady Constance's heart, or, at least, what she considered as such; and that she was in consequence left in a state of some annoyance and disappointment; and it was no doubt rather tantalising to be the witness of her sister's more successful fortune in that department; whilst she was a species of victim herself, having fully expected a proposal from Barry Denbigh.

As for the delinquent himself, he had gone away quite ignoring, or appearing to do so, that such expectations had been formed, and thinking no more—at the time—of Lady Constance as his wife, than he had done of her cousin Edith, or poor little Winnie Tempest. In regard to the latter, however, (towards

whom, if the truth be told, he felt the most tenderly disposed, of the three,) a startling piece of news awaited him when he returned home, which he did not do till some weeks after he had left the Castle, having, in the meantime, accomplished a small tour of shooting, and other visits.

CHAPTER XII.

IT was a piece of news that had already created the greatest excitement throughout Hilborough, and in some portions of its immediate vicinity. It was no other than the announcement of Winnie Tempest's engagement to be married. There certainly seemed no just cause or reason for surprise because a young, pretty girl like Winnie Tempest had found a lover, and was about to be happily wedded; still everybody, aunts included, appeared to consider it a marvellous event—nay, even Winnie herself was not without some feelings of astonishment at her own fortunate and happy lot. It had all come to pass through a succession of apparently accidental causes, that do

occasionally work such strange and unexpected changes in the lives of some individuals, and cause their friends to exclaim they must have been born under a "lucky star," as they seem to have profited by events over which neither they themselves nor others appear to have exercised any control.

The first step that led to this very desirable termination was considered anything but a piece of good fortune, as it commenced in a violent storm at sea. This unlucky gale drove the ship (in which Lieutenant Walter Bingham was pursuing his calling) on shore, and in such a seriously-damaged condition that she had to put in to the nearest port to be repaired and refitted. As some weeks were likely to elapse before she would be in a condition to go to sea again, the greater part of the hands on board were set at liberty to follow their own devices for the time being. Amongst this number was Walter Bingham. His steps were in consequence naturally directed towards his father's home. But when he arrived there, he found

both the Admiral and Mrs. Bingham absent—they were staying with friends in some remote part of Scotland, but were expected home at the end of a fortnight. Walter did not care to pursue them to John-o'-Groat's land, so determined, meanwhile, to bestow some of his spare time upon his uncle, Mr. Denbigh, at Nether Hall, having received unlimited invitations for the future, during the last visit he had paid there both from his uncle and cousin.

Arrived at Nether Hall, he had again the disappointment of finding an empty house, Mr. Denbigh and his son being at that time at Hampden Castle. He was beginning to think himself the especial victim of persevering ill-luck, when, disconsolately walking back into the town of Hilborough, with the intention of proceeding at once to the station, he happened to encounter his old friend and chum, Fitz Tempest. The meeting was a pleasant surprise on both sides. Fitz had only returned a short time from Admiral Bingham's, who was then starting for his northern expedition, and

all the family had firmly supposed Walter to be fairly in deep waters by that time. It was therefore that he appeared almost as an apparition before the astonished eyes of Fitz Tempest. All needful explanations were soon given, and joyfully received, and the two sailor friends determined to spend the spare time Walter had to dispose of together. For this purpose Walter took pleasant rooms as near the Cabin as circumstances permitted, and soon became as well acquainted with all the members of that quaint, quiet abode as Fitz himself, and almost as welcome there. Then it was the desired introduction to Winnie took place. She had long wished to see and know Fitz's dearest friend, Bingham. His name was familiar as a household word, and it did not take many days to perfect the acquaintance begun by such a strange chapter of accidents. That the young man fell very speedily and very desperately in love with his friend's pretty little sister, may be easily supposed. And Winnie, having happily survived any little tender recollection of the

inconstant Barry, was happily able to bestow a very fair share of reciprocal attachment upon his more fortunate (and deserving) cousin, Walter Bingham.

Things were about reaching their climax when, one fine morning, Walter received a letter to say the Admiral and Mrs. Bingham were about to return home, and would expect their son to join them without delay. Then it was Winnie seemed to wake from a very happy dream, and roused herself to say good-bye to Walter with as little visible emotion as she could help.

The two aunts were grieved at their favourite's sudden summons and departure, for they too had become fond of Fitz's friend. There was nothing said, however, of love or matrimony at that time. Fitz walked down with Walter to the station, and on their way there, they had a long, earnest conversation, and then he returned home, silent and more thoughtful than was natural to him. Winnie's eyes, with the long lashes still moist, met his, with a

wistful, questioning gaze; but Fitz did not seem inclined to talk, and the aunts alone lamented aloud.

After that, for a few days, a strange spirit of dulness seemed to pervade everything in and about the Cabin. Winnie moved about with a depressed air, and took little or no interest in the concerns of her neighbours, or the little gossip that her aunts from time to time retailed, in the hope of amusing and interesting her. Fitz was, as usual, very kind, but he did not seek her confidence, nor make the slightest remark about Walter that might tend to elicit any expression of her own feelings. He was evidently anxious, and on the look out for letters in the morning. He just mentioned, in answer to some inquiry from his Aunt Arthusa, that Walter had arrived at home and found all right there; but days passed and no second letter came, at which Fitz could hardly conceal his surprise and disappointment. Winnie at that time would go out long rambles by herself those dull, damp November days; but

she seemed to have very little to relate about them on her return.

Mr. and Mrs. Welby had been from home, but returned about then, and both the aunts rejoiced in the circumstance, as likely to give pleasant occupation and amusement once more to Winnie. Still, even when she heard Mrs. Welby was detained at home by a severe cold, she rather opposed any proposition made for going there. Winnie was becoming so listless and spiritless as days and weeks passed by, that it drew the attention of both her aunts as to what might be the cause; and Penelope was the first who, with hesitation, communicated her opinion to her sister, that Winnie had never been herself since young Bingham went away, and she was very much afraid he had been trifling with her affections, and had gained her love.

This announcement came with the light of a revelation upon Arethusa, who had never been in love herself, and was not apt to descry the symptoms in others. However, she immedi-

ately deferred to Penelope's decision, for not only had she herself been in love, but had received an offer of marriage, which she would willingly have accepted, had not her father's terribly obstinate temper interposed itself between her happiness and that of her lover. But that was many long years ago, when Penelope was young and rather pretty, and Lieutenant Browne, the hero of her romance, had been since promoted to a coastguard situation, where he had married, grown stout, and was now the father of six stalwart sons, who were in their turn making their way in this work-a-day world. Penelope had long outlived her disappointment, but it had made her tender to others when she saw them going through the ordeal that had cost her many tears at the time, and her kind heart ached at the thought of her darling being exposed to the same trouble.

Arethusa felt more angry than sorrowful on the occasion. She would gladly have seen Winnie happily settled in life, but she did not

think it was very likely, or at all necessary. They were all very poor. Winnie never went out like other girls, and, to her knowledge, no one had ever paid her any attention, so she had quite settled it in her own mind that Winnie was to settle down like themselves into contented old-maidenhood. Now that the cause of Winnie's loss of spirits and appetite became revealed, and duly acknowledged, she felt provoked with Fitz for having brought his friend to break up the cheerfulness and comfort of their quiet little home. Still more was she angry with Walter Bingham for winning the heart he seemed to prize so lightly; and vexed too did the good, sensible, strong-minded spinster feel with poor Winnie for being so easily wooed and won, observing, "Why, they haven't known each other three weeks." Nevertheless, she felt it was even as Penelope had suggested, and hardly needed her assurance that "time was not needed in such cases;" besides, Winnie looked upon Walter almost as an old acquaint-

ance, from being such a particular friend of Fitz's.

"I only wish he had been friend enough to have kept away from here, when he only came to do mischief, with his handsome face and pleasant tongue; he would have acted a much more friendly part in going away at once, when he saw our Winnie, and knew he could not ask her to marry him."

"Ah! young things like them never think of that till it is too late," answered Penelope with a sigh of recollection.

"Well, now the deed is done, and Winnie is made unhappy, as you were once, Pen, what is best to be done? The chances are she will never see him again, and I shall speak to Fitz about it."

"Don't do that, Arethusa—at all events not at present; let us try to divert her mind. She will get over it in time, though it seems very hard just at present. But time—time! It is wonderful what a healing power there is in that,

especially if one tries one's best." Another sigh, rather deeper than the last.

In consequence of the two sisters' conference respecting the state of poor Winnie's heart and spirits, they both made an appeal to her the following morning directly after breakfast, urging her to go and see her old friend Mrs. Welby. Of course they carefully abstained from all allusion to the subject of their discussion the preceding day.

Winnie looked up with listless eyes from the paper she was pretending to read, and answered—

"I really do not see why I should be in such a hurry to go to Mrs. Welby. I daresay she will send for me if she wants to see me."

"Now, Winnie, don't be idle, and neglect your best friends. I don't know what I shall think of you, if you give up going to the Rectory, where they have been so kind to you ever since you were a little child."

Winnie laid her paper down and walked to

the window, looked out, and shivered a little, then said,

“Everything looks so dreary, aunt. I am sure Mrs. Welby won’t expect me till brighter days come—that is, if ever they do look brighter than they do now.”

Penelope stole up to her niece, and kindly kissed her, saying—

“You can make it brighter, dear, yourself, and brighter, too, to Mrs. Welby, by going to see her now she is laid up. You don’t know how much you can do to lighten a trouble and brighten a gloomy day till you try. Now, be persuaded by me, and go at once, and then I know you will find the day lighter and brighter when you come back.”

Aunt Penelope spoke like a prophet, as Winnie often remembered and declared in the days to come; for she took her aunt’s advice, half from fear of betraying herself, if she was so resolute in resisting her aunt’s importunities, and fearing lest her secret should be guessed. So she put on her hat and cloak and walked

away to spend an hour or two with her old friend. She certainly did feel all the lighter and brighter as she returned home after the little act of self-sacrifice and the exertion she had been compelled to make, in order to appear in any way like the Winnie of old, who was so glad and happy in visiting the Rectory.

Mrs. Welby was still enough of an invalid not to be particularly alive to the change in Winnie's looks, from which all their former cheerfulness had so visibly departed. The poor little girl's subdued manner, too, excited no observation, for it seemed well suited to the tone of that shaded apartment, with its weak and ailing inhabitant.

Thus Winnie accomplished her dreaded visit to the Rectory, and was even sensible of a slight glow of satisfaction when Mrs. Welby thanked her for coming, and said the sight of her had done her good, and begged that she would soon repeat her visit. Winnie was glad that it was over, though glad that she had been, and thinking over that, and some few things

her old friend had said, insensibly forgot herself and Walter Bingham's desertion for a short time. She loitered and lingered about the lanes adjacent to the Cabin, till the waning light of the short November afternoon gave notice that it was time to return home.

Poor Winnie closed the gate that led to the house, with a sigh, and looked up at the little Cabin, where she had of late been so intensely happy, with a thrill of painful recollection that caused the ready tears to gather in her eyes. She brushed them away, however, as she arrived at the door of the house, and seeing lights shining from the parlour window, carefully removed all traces of them before she made her appearance in the sitting-room.

As she closed the hall-door, the one opposite opened hastily, and her Aunt Penelope appeared on the threshold. Then, coming up to Winnie, she took both her hands in hers as she drew her further into the hall and looked tenderly in her face, now fully visible by the lamp which stood there.

"I have been, Auntie, as you wished me," said Winnie, rather wondering at her aunt's caresses, and hurried and flurried manner, and then adding, "But I have not been there all the time; I have been dawdling in the lanes since."

"Oh, my dear child, why did you not come home sooner? We have been so wearying and waiting for you! I heard your step and the door open, but I do not think the others know you are come in."

"What others?" asked Winnie, with a sudden choking sensation, and a great rush of joy to her heart.

Then Aunt Penelope threw both her arms round Winnie's neck, and covered her face with kisses, as she whispered,

"It is all right, my darling; there is nothing but joy for you henceforth. They are both come!"

"*Both*, auntie. Oh! what do you mean?"

The meaning was very satisfactorily explained that same moment, for the parlour door

opened again, and this time it was Walter Bingham who made his appearance. As he approached Winnie, Aunt Penelope discreetly took her departure, whilst he said,

“I have come back, Winnie, to claim you as my darling wife. I could not come before, but I have brought my dear good father with me; he longs to see you, and you will be glad, darling, won't you, to see him?”

“Glad! oh, Walter!”

Then there was a pause, and Winnie ran upstairs to take off her things and prepare to make her appearance before her father-in-law.

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT was the brief history of Winnie's wooing and subsequent engagement; for everything was happily arranged the following day, to the entire satisfaction not only of the lovers themselves, but of the friends and relatives on either side. Walter soon accounted for his silence after his departure and apparent forgetfulness of his friends at the Cabin. He found his father and mother on the very eve of leaving the house they had lived in for some time, and going to one in another county. Admiral Bingham, though a man of independent means, had no place of his own. He rather liked moving about, and he and his wife had spent a good deal of their spare time on

the Continent. They had just hired a small place of an old friend and acquaintance of Mrs. Bingham's, an old lady whom she had not seen since the days of her girlhood, when their respective families were friends and neighbours. She was an old Mrs. Montague, who was by birth a Lyndon, and Mrs. Bingham was then a Miss Denbigh of Nether Hall. They fell in with this somewhat eccentric old lady in the course of their expedition to Scotland, when they were both sojourning at some small Inn by the wayside. Mrs. Bingham knew perfectly well who the old lady was when she had ascertained from whence she came, and they found that Mrs. Montague, in spite of her years and infirmities, was making a little tour, accompanied only by her own maid, an elderly woman, and her Scotch bailiff, at whose instance she had undertaken this northern expedition. Some slight service rendered by Admiral Bingham to the old lady, whom he accidentally encountered in an early walk, brought about an acquaintance; and then she easily remembered

who Mrs. Bingham was, though altered out of all knowledge.

Mrs. Montague took a fancy to the Admiral, partly on account of his profession ; for Captain Montague had been a naval man, and she loved the profession still for his sake, and she imagined there was something in Admiral Bingham's manner that reminded her of her long lost husband.

Mrs. Montague was also pleased to extend her favourable opinion to his wife. She had liked some of the Denbighs in bygone days, and though Mrs. Bingham belonged to a younger generation than herself, she remembered all about her and her family perfectly well. Mrs. Montague told her new friends she was travelling as far North as she could to get rid of any lurking infection about herself or attendants, having left her home to be disinfected during her absence, after a fever that had broken out among some of her servants. They parted after passing a few days together, the Bingham's being engaged to visit a friend

further North, and Mrs. Montague going in a contrary direction. They had, however, agreed to meet again very shortly ; for it transpired that the lease of the Admiral's present house was all but expired, and they had not provided themselves with a new abode, intending to go to Brighton for the winter. It was then that a sudden idea struck Mrs. Montague, and she asked these new friends to come and visit her, and look at a house which belonged to her, and of which they might take immediate possession did it happen to suit their fancy.

It was well furnished, and had been recently occupied, but was at that time standing empty.

"And if I had not met you," she explained, "I intended it should have remained empty the remainder of my days. I disliked the people extremely who happened to hire it, and never went near them. So I was very thankful when the three years were over, and the people went away."

The account given of this place, which was within a mile of the park, and called "The

Firs," took the Admiral's fancy, especially as Mrs. Montague promised him unlimited fishing and shooting. That inducement was quite enough to make both him and his wife anxious to see "The Firs." They were neither of them very fastidious people, and had travelled about and inhabited so many strange places in the course of their lives, that Mrs. Montague's proffered abode seemed, from her description (which was evidently by no means a prejudiced one), just the sort of place to suit; and Mrs. Denbigh was pleased with the idea of the companionship of old Mrs. Montague, who she knew had been somewhat a noted and admired character in her day.

Thus it came to pass that on her return home she intended for the first time for many years to open her doors to admit stranger guests. The Admiral and Mrs. Bingham were just starting on their visit of inspection when joined by their son. They were very desirous that he should be of what they called their "reconnoitring party." So Walter, finding

both his father and mother so absorbed in this new pursuit, kept his own counsel, and waited for a favourable moment to submit his own peculiar affairs to their consideration.

There was a good deal to be done and thought of just then ; so Walter waited patiently, never doubting but that Winnie understood him too well to have any doubts and fears, and feeling only how doubly delightful it would be to go down accompanied by his father, and claim sweet Winnie as his bride.

The house suited well, and the vicinity also. Mrs. Montague was charmed with the unwonted prospect of neighbours she could really like, and people who did not want gaiety, and would occasionally enliven her many solitary hours. She thought, too, how pleasant it would be to have a little variety to offer Clare Lyndon when she next came to stay with her. Mrs. Montague had had rather too much of the solitude which she had first courted, many years before. With the exception of the old clergyman and his three spinster daughters, she had gradually

dropped all her former friends and acquaintances. She was a spoilt child even in her old age. She had been born and bred a beauty, and an heiress in right of her mother, who had married the younger brother of Sir Montague's grandfather. An only child, too, she had been indulged in every possible whim and way, and when she chose to marry a poor man of good family, Captain Montague, no objection was made. He was worthy of the trust reposed in him by Miss Lyndon's parents; and they died within a short time of each other, and a year after their only child's marriage.

Deepwell Park came to Mrs. Montague from her mother, and she continued to live there after her marriage the same as before. She was clever and handsome in those days, and her husband worshipped her much after the fashion of her father and mother, so the spoiling went on, and Mrs. Montague was often considered, with good reason, capricious and despotic by her many friends and acquaintances. Still to her husband she was the most devoted

of wives—always ready to give way to him ; but it was to him alone ; and then as he never thwarted her, and most tenderly shielded her from every possible trouble or annoyance, she had little cause for self-abnegation as regarded him.

Captain and Mrs. Montague had an only daughter, a fair, beautiful girl, very like Clare Lyndon, gentle and obedient to her mother, and also like her. But Mrs. Montague, though adoring her daughter, was not as blindly indulgent towards her as her own parents had been to herself ; she even took upon herself the fearful responsibility of disposing of her hand in marriage without the assurance that her heart was concerned in the match.

It was a grand marriage that poor Lydia Montague made, and the man was in no way objectionable—simply the young girl did not care for him ; but her mother's wishes were laws which were not to be broken or opposed. So the poor girl became a duchess, but, before the year of her bridal was over, she died. Cap-

tain Montague had not desired the marriage, but he had never in his life opposed his wife's wishes, and Lydia uttered no complaint. It was not till after her death that her mother knew for certain she had been attached to another, but one who, though loving her devotedly, dared not from his circumstances in life propose to her. When Captain Montague as well as his wife, became from some casual circumstance aware of the fact, he never held up his head again. He seemed broken-hearted, though possibly he might have been out of health at the time.

However, Mrs. Montague was left a widow a year after she had lost her only child—Lydia left no child—and the Duke married again very shortly, so the remembrance of his first fair young wife soon passed away from the memory of most of those who had known her for one short year as the wife of the Duke of A——. Mrs. Montague was then left alone. She never spoke of her lost daughter by the title she had earned so dearly, if ever she did name her. It

was simply as "my Lydia." Mrs. Montague's strong mind bore up even in the depths of her desolation. It was at that time, more than thirty years since she had lost both child and husband, and been left alone. In all those solitary years who can tell what bitter regrets, what consuming remorse, must have been her portion, even in the midst of the wealth and splendour that was still hers. If such feelings ever existed, they were all for her most inward life ; outwardly she was much the same, and did not display her grief, nor could any one have suspected the depth of bitterness that poisoned all the enjoyments of life from that time forth. She became as she grew older rather eccentric and uncertain in her manners and temper, but full of kind and charitable deeds to the poor around, and all that needed her assistance, though peremptory in her mode of dispensation. She retained some few friends and friendships after her widowhood, but by degrees they either dropped off by death, or became gradually estranged. So, as life advanced, the circle

around her grew narrower and narrower. She was fond of her nephew and godson, Sir Montague Lyndon, but, like most of those she had loved, he too died; and now Clare was about the only creature in the wide world the rich desolate old woman cared for.

She did not much like her great-nephew Vere; she always fancied he resembled his mother, and gave him credit for being as cold-hearted (which he by no means was). Lady Lyndon herself she had never cordially liked, though, for her nephew's sake, she had made her acquaintance when they first came to England after his marriage.

At that time Alice, Lady Lyndon, was about twenty, and had been married some two years or more. They brought their only child with them, Sidney, their eldest born. Sir Montague was a most devoted husband and father. Mrs. Montague had been a widow some years, and the intensity of her first grief had subsided. She was glad to see her nephew, and welcomed the wife he brought with him, because she was

his wife. It was impossible not to be struck with the rare and extraordinary beauty of Alice Lyndon. It was evident her husband worshipped *it* and *her*. Mrs. Montague was desirous of making a friend of Montague's wife. But the two natures did not coalesce. Mrs. Montague made kindly attempts to gain the confidence of the young wife. She was aware her nephew had descended from his own position in marrying her, but it was impossible to draw any such confession from Lady Lyndon. Had she told her history, whatever it might have been, to Mrs. Montague, she would have opened her arms and her heart to her at once. But there was no such candour in Lady Lyndon's nature. She parried all the questions put to her by her husband's aunt, and made the best of her former position, whatever it might have been. When Mrs. Montague asked,

“Now tell me, Alice, something about yourself and your own people—you know I am deeply interested in all that concerns Montague; and he tells me he married you out of

a school at Brussels, so you must please tell me a little more; and mind, my dear child, it is just the same to me whether you were born in a castle or a cottage, for you are now his wife."

To this Lady Lyndon made reply, coldly looking up from her work—

"You are very kind, dear Mrs. Montague, and I feel greatly obliged by your interest in me and mine. I wish I could relate something worth your hearing as to my antecedents; but, indeed, they are very commonplace. All I know is that my aunt, Miss Alice Smythe, brought me up entirely, and placed me at that school at Brussels, and she told me I was an orphan."

"Then have you never been in England, my dear? I ask because you speak perfect English."

"Oh! yes, we lived some years—all the early years of my life in England."

"What part of England?"

Lady Lyndon's beautiful brow contracted, but she answered, carelessly,

"Oh! in various places. She was in reduced circumstances, and went out as a daily governess, so she lived generally in London, and occasionally we went to other places."

"Then Miss Smythe had no permanent engagement?"

"I am sure I do not know—I was too young to be curious on such matters. I believe we are an Irish family by birth, and formerly of good position and connections."

Mrs. Montague then began to believe that there was really no more to be known of Lady Lyndon's antecedents than she had revealed to her; and from the little Sir Montague dropped in answer to her inquiries, she inferred the same.

During Sir Montague's life-time, he came and went occasionally to Deepwell Park; but though always accompanied by his wife, the intimacy did not progress. Neither of the ladies really liked each other, and after Sir Montague's death, Lady Lyndon seized an early opportunity of being affronted with some remarks

made by Mrs. Montague in reference to her nephew's strange will, leaving everything in the power of his wife. There was no attempt made to prevent Clare from visiting her great-aunt, but it seemed Lady Lyndon was glad to avail herself of the first opportunity of dropping the acquaintance; nor was Mrs. Montague sorry when Clare came by herself to pay her yearly visits. It was about the time she was expected that Mrs. Montague's new tenants came, saw, and approved of all they saw, and were quickly installed as inmates of the Firs.

When Walter at last told the story of his love to the sympathizing ears and hearts of his father and mother, there was not a word of objection raised. They both knew the name and family of Tempest, and Winnie's father had been well acquainted with the Admiral, whilst he was happy to acknowledge Fitz as an old friend and valued acquaintance of his dear boy Walter. So there was not the slightest demur made as to receiving Winnie as a

daughter, though Walter honestly confessed, "She has not got a penny in the world, and I am sure I don't want one. She is worth untold gold herself." Then the good Admiral declared he would go down himself and see the treasure Walter had won in Fitz's sweet little sister. The Admiral also added he should make Fitz come down and bring this charming Winnie with him to make acquaintance with Walter's mother, and then all things could be arranged as to time and such settlements as it was in the Admiral's power to make.

Walter was then an only child, for his elder brother had died some few years back, and both the Admiral and his kind-hearted wife agreed between them, when they talked the matter over, that it would be very desirable that Walter should be enabled to marry at once; and for that purpose the Admiral said he should get his son's appointment cancelled for his proposed voyage; and no doubt plenty of substitutes might be found happy and willing to

take his place—it would be far better than letting the poor young thing he was engaged to go fretting her heart out for the next three years.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was Christmas time, and the Dowager, Lady Fullerton sat by her fireside at the Grove, well wrapped up, for she was rheumatic, and doing nothing, for her eyes were weak. She was in that mood which craves some little excitement or diversion of mind. Lady Jane was always dutifully attentive in endeavouring to promote her mother's comfort and amusement to the utmost of her powers, but unfortunately, as regarded the last, she had seldom anything to relate with which the Dowager was not quite as well, or even better acquainted than herself. It was a dull afternoon on this particular day, and no one had appeared in the course of it to bring the least sensation of

change and diversion of mind to the Dowager. It cannot be denied that she was feeling very dull and rather cross in consequence ; and let no one blame her—for to be suffering from rheumatic pains, and incapacity for occupation by reason of dim eyes, is, to say the least, trying. At last, after turning the screen which she held in her hand in every possible direction, she spoke.

“I do wish, Jane, you would put down that eternal knitting ; it fidgets me both to see you going on, on, for ever, round and round, and to hear the click of those tiresome needles.”

Lady Jane was just in the agonies of turning the heel of her sock artistically ; however, she put it down good-naturedly at the poor peevish woman’s request and said,

“Would you like a little reading, mother ?”

“No, certainly not. I am not well enough to listen ; you would only send me to sleep ; all the books you get are so stupid.”

Then, as Lady Jane looked wistfully at her knitting, as if meditating an escape with it, be-

yond the regions of her mother's supervision, the Dowager exclaimed peevishly,

"Can't you *talk* to me? haven't you anything new to tell me?"

"I fear not at present; you have heard all about Winnie Tempest's intended marriage? I have heard nothing new respecting it."

"Of course," replied her mother, "we have heard plenty on that subject. One would think no one had ever been married, or engaged to be before, by the fuss these two aunts of hers make about it. However, a wedding is certainly something very new in the experience of these old ladies. I rather expected them to call this afternoon."

"Perhaps they may come yet," said Lady Jane reassuringly.

"No, they won't, for it is past three, and they never come as late as that at this time of the year; but,—hark! stop! Yes, there *is* a ring at the bell, someone *is* come! Why don't they answer the bell and bring them in?" said the Dowager impatiently.

The door opened at last, but it was not to admit the Miss Tempests, but the Reverend Augustus Hampden, who came over, as was his wont some time during the Christmas season, to pay his usual visit.

"Dear me! I did not expect you to-day, Augustus! Why did not you write to say you were coming, and where is Edith?"

The honourable and reverend gentleman was looking rather more plaintive than usual, for things were not going as smoothly as might be wished at home, and it had suddenly struck him he would ride over to the Grove for a few days change of air and scene.

"I did not bring Edith; she was wanted at home. Georgie is not well, and she cannot get on without her."

"Why, what is your beauty, Miss Florence, doing? Why cannot she nurse her mother, since she has made her ill by taking her about from one place to another to show herself off? Well! has any good come of it all?"

"None that I am aware of," replied her son

with a sigh. "All I know is it has been a great expense to me, and one, with my large family and small means, I am very ill able to afford."

"Which means, I suppose," said the Dowager pettishly, "that you cannot manage your Christmas bills without my help?"

"I should indeed be very thankful for it, mother; but I did not come over for that purpose—at least not exactly," said the clergyman, honestly correcting himself. Lady Jane looked vexed, her brother worried, and the Dowager annoyed. At length she spoke—

"If your family is so inconveniently large, why do not you marry your daughters off?"

"As if it lay in *my* power!" said the poor man helplessly; then adding, "Besides, I thought there was some talk of your marrying Edith to young Denbigh; but when I asked her she said there was not the most remote chance of such a thing happening, and she said, too, she believed he liked her cousin Constance, if he liked any one. So her mother thought I had better not bring her to-day; besides, Georgie

wants her at home, for there is a great deal to be done at Christmas."

"And is that the reason you came out?" asked the Dowager tartly.

"Well, I thought perhaps you might like to see me, or one of us as usual, at this time; but it seems I am mistaken," returned her son, more plaintively than ever.

"No, you are not," said Lady Jane kindly. "Mamma is always glad to see you, as you know very well."

"Yes, when he comes to see *me*, and not to bring his Christmas bills."

"I have not brought them, mother," said he meekly.

"Well, perhaps not bodily, but you have brought all the worry of them with you, and that is the same thing."

"I only wish I *could* escape the worry of them, mother. I would gladly leave them behind."

"Well, let's talk of something pleasanter. Pray, are you asked to marry the happy couple

next month—your niece Audrey and our neighbour Sir Vere Lyndon?”

“I do not know, but I think it likely that I shall be, seeing I am the only clergyman in the family. I shall be asked at least to ‘assist.’ They *must* ask us, I suppose, as Edith and Florence are to be two of the bridesmaids. It is a good match, is it not, for Audrey, for she has been out four years at least?”

Lady Fullerton acquiesced in this opinion; and then they proceeded to discuss the matter more fully in all its various bearings. In so doing the Dowager felt her spirit revive, and she almost forgot her rheumatic pains and want of eye-sight; whilst the Rev. Augustus Hampden, in sitting cozily over the fire, without any annoying interruptions, also felt peaceful and resigned, and forgot for the time being his many domestic worries. Lady Jane was perhaps the one most ill at ease in that small family group, though certainly more individually exempt from personal annoyances than either of the other two.

She was suffering from a keen sense of those many trifling evils which, small in themselves, make the sum of human things. She was vexed on account of her heart's darling, Edith. All the happy air-castles she had raised for her future habitation seemed melting away, like the baseless fabric of a dream. She had for some short time past feared it might be so, and her brother's words had confirmed her apprehensions as to Barry Denbigh's having no serious thoughts of Edith. She dared not ask herself whether it was a matter of sorrow and disappointment to the girl herself. She trusted it might not be so, from the fact of her candid answer to her father's inquiries. She was vexed at his having put the question to Edith, for it might have given her pain, or at all events vexation. But as it was so, perhaps it was as well she did not come so frequently for the present. She could not help remembering the time when Edith and Barry were constant playfellows and companions, and had certainly thought, long after

that, that Edith cared for Barry. Still, she felt sure, if Edith had for a moment suspected that her old friend and companion had ceased to regard her as he did, or had never really cared for her, she had sufficient spirit and resolution to save herself, before it was too late, from the pangs of ill-requited love.

Then it grieved good Lady Jane to see her brother so oppressed and ground down by domestic difficulties and debts, which his wife's selfish indolence and his daughter's careless extravagance and craving after impossibilities tended to increase so overwhelmingly. She loved her brother, but knew he was weak, and had little stability of purpose, or power to hold his own in the face of such contrarieties as he might meet with at home. She knew how lowering and debasing to a man's character (especially a clergyman's) is the burden of debts he is unable to meet; and she saw it all reflected in her brother's uneasy countenance, and even in his meek endurance of his mother's taunts.

He had not the heart to defend himself, or any member of his family, whilst he clung to the hope that she would assist him.

He was, as regarded himself, innocent enough of running up bills he had no means of paying, and would have managed to live well on his income, had it rested alone with him and Edith. But Mrs. Hampden, possessed with the idea of her second daughter's extreme beauty, and weary herself of her secluded life, though really unable, from her state of health, to enjoy any gaiety, had managed, in various ways, seriously to hamper their slender finances; and whilst all their ready money had been trifled away on dress and amusement, everything of importance was left to accumulate; and now that Christmas was come, poor Mr. Hampden found himself seriously embarrassed. Still he hoped his mother might be inclined to help him to settle the most pressing of his bills. He was sure Jane would do so if she could, but he was well aware her means were very limited, and she had little more than served to cover her needful expenses.

Poor Lady Jane, meanwhile, had sorrowfully arrived at the same conclusions, and was turning over in her mind what possible little sacrifices she could make to save her brother's credit. No one, to have looked round that pleasant drawing-room, that cold Winter's afternoon, could have guessed the state of mind that possessed each of the occupants. The room, with its pretty furniture, and variety of ornamental things grouped in various parts, all testified to the good taste of the venerable-looking Dowager who appeared to be so cosily seated there, talking with her clerical son and attentive daughter, all apparently enjoying themselves in the warm firelight. Who would have thought they were one and all as thoroughly uncomfortable and depressed as untoward circumstances could make them. There was certainly some relief in the Dowager's case, when the tide of gossip with her son had fairly set in, and he himself was for a time beguiled out of his sorrowful reflections. But poor Lady Jane enjoyed hers to the full, when restored to her obnoxious occupation,

by her mother's thoughts and eyes being otherwise directed, and she sat and knitted unproved, and constructed and unravelled many a little web of her own making besides.

It had been one subject of regret to her that for some time past they had seen so much less of their old friend and neighbour Mr. Denbigh. He had been very little to the Grove since he returned from the Castle. The intended marriage of Audrey and Vere Lyndon then had of course been duly announced, and fitting congratulations returned in answer. The Dowager declared that it was all owing to the visit her relations had made her in the summer; and this affirmation was, in fact, partly correct. Still, as Lady Fullerton (the younger) had made up her mind to become acquainted with the Lyndons, she would no doubt have found some other way of accomplishing her object, had her plan of coming to the Grove for the purpose failed.

The daylight faded, and Lady Jane took her work to a distant window, whilst the buzz

and hum of conversation went on by the cozy fireside. The Dowager was by that time quite reconciled to her son's coming, though he had given no note of warning of it, and she was feeling cross when he appeared, and therefore was inclined to be contradictory on the first subject that presented itself. She, too, had been vexed at having seen so little of the Denbighs since they returned home, especially of the elder, who had been so much longer in their neighbourhood. Whilst they were at the Castle, and Edith was there too, she had been perfectly satisfied, as, indeed, had been her more patient daughter. But when both the Denbighs came home, and Edith went back to hers, and nothing had come of a meeting from which so much was expected, then the Dowager waxed wroth in her own mind. Though she said but little, she felt the more ; and now her son's communication respecting the transfer of Barry's attentions to her cousin Constance completed the measure of her discomfiture.

"I really think I could hardly bear to see him

here, and think he has behaved shamefully, and, no doubt, so does his father, and that is the reason he is keeping away ; but as to Mr. Barry, I never wish to speak to him again ; to leave our nice, pretty Edith, for that stupid, plain cousin of his, is quite incomprehensible !”

“Not at all, my dear mother,” responded her son plaintively. “Mr. Bertram Denbigh only goes the way of the world. My Edith is the daughter of a poor clergyman, and of no importance out of her own family circle (where every one adores her) ; whilst Lady Constance, her cousin, is a fine fashionable young lady, who can dispense with beauty, and agreeability, and amiability too, on that account, and is therefore much more to the young gentleman’s taste—especially when he happens to be a visitor, of no great importance himself, in her father’s house, except on such terms.”

This was said in such a plaintive and injured tone of voice, that it concealed half of the bitterness which prompted the speaker’s utterance ; and it may be further added, his mother per-

fectly agreed with her son's view of the case; so nothing could be more cordial and happy than their intercourse that evening.

Lady Jane sighed as some of these speeches reached her ear, and she tried not to listen to what was only painful. There seemed such a littleness, to her candid mind, in venting their disappointment in such disparaging, ill-natured comments on Barry Denbigh and poor Lady Constance. She was as sorry and as disappointed as any one of them; but it did not mend the matter to grow ill-natured and unkind in discussing it.

"It is rather tantalizing," continued Mr. Hampden, "to have to go to all these happy weddings, and see everything done in such grand style, and people flirting and proposing everywhere about you, and see your own daughters, who are every bit as well born, and a thousand times handsomer and better in every way, neglected, because my brother Fullerton happened to be born a few years before me."

"Yes," said the Dowager. "But that, un-

fortunately, makes all the difference, and we can't alter it; so I advise you to make the best of it, and let Florence go and stay with her cousins in future, and get them to take her out as they ought; and don't let her ruin you, or kill her mother, by running about and buying smart dresses to set herself off. Make what use you can of your friends, even if they are not exactly to your taste—not that I think those two girls are quite so objectionable as you say; I have seen others I liked less.”

“Well, I really know very little about them, as neither Georgie nor I ever go to the Castle, though they do ask the girls, as you know, sometimes. But I suppose we shall have to go to London to this wedding, if we can afford it.”

“You know very well that you *cannot* afford it, Augustus, so don't let your wife think of it, even if she is asked. Her health is quite sufficient reason for staying at home, as you say she is worse since your last expedition. And with all the children too! I am sure she is best at

home; but it is quite right that you and the two girls should go; and you must make them take you all in at Grosvenor Square. Don't think of an hotel for a moment. Tell Fullerton and Isabella frankly that you can't afford the expense. I have no idea of standing on ceremony with them. Tell the truth, and you will be none the worse for it."

Mr. Hampden sat for some time pondering over his mother's words. At last he said—

"But I expect Georgie will wish to go too, if she is asked; and in that case it would do her more harm to oppose her wishes than to let her go."

"Very well," said his mother coldly. "You know what *I* think; but of course you are both at liberty to ruin yourselves your own way. I shall not help you to do it."

"Then she shall *not* go!" said her son with a gasp.

The Dowager only smiled, but said no more.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. HAMPDEN stayed on at the Grove for a day or two longer, and made himself welcome, and even agreeable, by the readiness with which he sought out and retailed all the news he could collect in his daily rambles. Meanwhile his wife was satisfied with his prolonged absence, hoping he was making the most of his time in getting his mother or sister to help him to pay off some of the most pressing of their Christmas bills.

Mrs. Hampden was not really an ill-disposed woman, but she was culpably weak and negligent in the management of her household and family. It was happy for her she had such a daughter as Edith at hand; and at the present

time all the burden of the family affairs was rolled over upon her. She was expected to write appeasing letters to creditors, to manage the house and children, and do everything that her mother's indolence prevented her undertaking herself.

Poor Edith ! it was not quite as pleasant a life as she had been leading lately at the Castle with her cousins, and she found herself often wondering and speculating on what might be going on amongst them at that time. She fully expected to hear that Audrey's would not be the only wedding that year in the family, for she had observed the attention which her old friend Barry had paid Constance ; and had also noted that it seemed well received by her cousin.

The girls kept up a correspondence when she first returned home, but it soon dropped, for Edith had hardly time for any writing, except business letters ; and when the governess was dismissed (as the first step towards retrenchment), then her duties increased in pro-

portion to her sister Florence's idleness, and disinclination to take her part in the school-room. It was, in fact, a very dull, prosaic life that Edith was compelled to lead at that time. It furnished nothing worth writing about to her gay, happy cousins, nor did it afford any subject of interest to a single creature out of her own immediate circle.

Thus Christmas was tided over, and the new year opened, bringing its budget of joys and woes, to be dealt out in its course amongst the world in general. And very differently was its coming promise regarded by Edith and her friend Winnie. To the latter the new year came fraught with every blessing that earth could bestow; whilst the vista of succeeding years seemed to disclose a dim perspective of increasing happiness, for were they not all to be spent with her beloved Walter?

Thus whilst Edith—who really deserved as happy a lot as Winnie—was shut up in the dreary little parsonage of Stony Marsh, vexing her heart out over the family troubles and

cares, there was her little friend, without having stirred a step from Hilborough, suddenly elevated to the highest pinnacle of human felicity. Indeed, it did seem rather hard that the winds and waves should have troubled themselves to waft such an eligible lover to her feet at that out-of-the-way place, whilst Edith's sister, the lovely Florence, had met with no such good fortune even on the sea-shore of Brighton, where her last resort had been, after a succession of visits her father and mother had been induced to make on her behalf. But it is very evident the tide of good fortune sets in one direction whilst it retires in another; and it is certain that Winnie, who once seemed destined to pass her days in obscurity, now appeared to be enjoying herself in the full light of prosperity. It was indeed the happiest Christmas she had ever passed in her life, or believed in the possibility of passing, for Fitz took her down to spend it at the Firs, with Walter's father and mother, remaining there with her. And it was whilst she was there, that another wish of her

innocent heart was granted and fulfilled to the utmost—she made the acquaintance of Clare Lyndon, and formed a friendship with her of the warmest nature.

Lady Lyndon did as she intended, in taking Clare herself to the nearest station to Deepwell Park, where she was to be met by Mrs. Montague's carriage; and having seen her safely into that, Lady Lyndon waited for and returned home by the next train that went in that direction. Just before they parted, Clare asked when her mother would wish her to come back and join her at the court. After a moment's consideration, Lady Lyndon said,

“As you are here, you can remain three or four weeks, so you may spend Christmas with Mrs. Montague, as she will no doubt wish you to do.”

“But won't you really want me then, mamma?”

“No. I will send for you soon after. Vere shall fetch you when he comes home. You know he will remain over Christmas at the

Castle, and soon after that I expect the family from there will come and stay a short time, on their way to town. And I think, Clare, that I shall ask Lord Tudor to meet them then," said the lady, looking steadily at her daughter, who replied, without hesitation,

"Oh! that will do very nicely, mamma. Lord Tudor said he should like to see our old place, so it will be a good opportunity, and he is always so pleasant. We shall have a very nice party, I am sure; but, mamma, dear, are you sure you will not mind spending Christmas alone, as Vere is to remain at the Castle then?"

"Never mind me, Clare, I can take care of myself, and, if I find it dull, I can ask some one to spend the time with me; but I have no apprehension on that head, it is not the first time I have been alone. Come, now it is time for you to drive off, everything is put into the carriage, and so you had better not be late. Good-bye, my dear. You will write to me from time to time?"

And so the mother and daughter parted, and

Clare went all unconsciously to meet her fate. Whilst her mother, forgetting both son and daughter for a time, went in another direction, with her mind full of matters in which they had no concern.

Little, indeed, did Clare expect the tidings which met her on her arrival at Deepwell Park. Never had she seen her old friend so cheerful, almost gay. When she arrived she found her sitting, to her astonishment, in the yellow satin drawing-room, the state apartment, which had never been used, or the furniture uncovered, in Clare's recollection, except on that one memorable occasion when she spent her sixteenth birthday at Deepwell with her brother Vere, and, by way of amusing them, Mrs. Montague proposed they should perform some *tableaux* for the edification of the Miss Skinners (the Rector's daughters), who were to pass the evening with them. And then it was that Clare, under Mrs. Montague's practised and critical superintendence, made her first appearance as the "Beatrice" of Dante. And now for the second

time she saw that grand apartment set out, and brilliantly lighted, as if for the reception of company. Clare had never heard of Winnie Tempest's engagement, or had an idea that Admiral and Mrs. Bingham were become such near neighbours of her old friend's—or, indeed, had ever heard anything about them at all, except that she was Mr. Denbigh's sister. Therefore, when Mrs. Montague announced that she expected them to dinner that day, it came with all the force of a pleasant surprise upon Clare. How pleasant it was to prove she never suspected, till Mrs. Montague, just before their arrival, said to her great-niece,

“You may possibly know something of the little bride-elect, as she comes from your neighbourhood, though you have not had time to make many acquaintances there as yet.”

To this Clare quietly replied that she had only met Miss Tempest two or three times, and the first time was when she was greatly alarmed by a savage bull. She had, however, seen enough of her to know she was very pretty,

and she liked what she had seen. It seemed Clare omitted all mention of the brother, who had rescued her and Vere from their perilous encounter, and the time was too short to enter into further particulars, for the party from the Firs was announced very shortly after.

Clare was not aware that Fitz was also at the Firs, and coming to dine that day, or perhaps she might have been more explicit. And had she been better prepared to meet him, possibly that sweet, sudden blush of surprise would never have risen to tell a tale which thereby made itself suspected.

Fitz had heard Clare was coming to stay with Mrs. Montague, so he had schooled down his heart to allow of his meeting her with becoming composure outwardly; but he could not restrain the thrill of joy which set it beating so wildly as he looked upon her lovely face once more. It was vain for poor Fitz to tell that doomed heart that Clare Lyndon's visit to Deepwell was no concern of his, and that it had been even better for him if he had never been asked to

meet her there, that no good could possibly come of it, and that the sooner he went away and ended his visit to his kind friends at the Firs the better. It was all very well to preach so to himself, but to practise was a far different thing. Indeed, it could hardly have been expected of human nature, when he saw, and mesmerically felt, that sweet Clare was happy, too, to meet him once more.

He was appointed to take her in to dinner, for Mrs. Montague liked to pair the young ones off together. There was one more guest, a middle-aged clergyman, lately come into the neighbourhood (liked by the Binghams, and tolerated by Mrs. Montague), who fell to the share of Mrs. Bingham, whilst the lady of the house was happy in appropriating her favourite Admiral; so, whilst Walter of course took charge of his Winnie, Fitz and Clare inevitably came together.

By the time that they joined the procession into the dining-room, and Clare's white-gloved hand rested lightly on Fitz's black sleeve, her

self-possession had returned ; and then, as the way was somewhat long, she beguiled it by murmuring gentle congratulations on Winnie's happy prospects ; to which Fitz returned, as in duty bound, fervent thanks, saying,

“It is indeed great joy to me, as well as to themselves, for Walter is the oldest friend I have in the world, and the best ; and as for Winnie, she is the dearest little sister, and deserves him—they are sure to be happy.”

Clare thought Winnie was indeed a fortunate girl to have gained such an unexceptionable lover, and to possess such a devoted brother besides. She kept, however, the latter part of her opinion to herself, but took occasion to let Fitz know she had not expected to meet him that day, or knew he was in that neighbourhood. Mrs. Montague had told her all about his sister, but had not mentioned him.

“I was not worth mentioning to you, I dare say,” was the answer given in a sudden spirit of humility.

Clare let it pass, however ; and then she told

Fitz that her brother was also just engaged to be married, so it seemed there was an especial similarity in their respective family relations just then; and during dinner—that happy dinner, as they both thought it—they found endless subjects to discuss, and were quite surprised when Mrs. Montague made the move to go into the drawing-room. However, they made up for the temporary separation, as they talked together incessantly during the rest of the evening, except during the time that an attempt at music was made; but as neither Winnie nor her lover was musical, and only cared for it as a cover for conversation, it soon fell to the ground, when Clare became the sole performer.

The circumstances under which they met at that time were particularly propitious to their growing attachment, for they were inevitably thrown together; and what occurred the first day was but a type of the many that succeeded it. There were morning meetings, and afternoon walks, and evening dinner-parties—not of

many guests, but just the select few already mentioned. It was hardly possible that Mrs. Montague could be blind and deaf enough not to see and understand what was becoming patent to everyone around.

One morning Mrs. Montague said suddenly to Clare, as she sat copying some music after breakfast, and ever and anon glancing out of the window down the drive,

"Pray, my dear, how long were you acquainted with Mr. Tempest before you met him here?"

"Oh! only a very short time," returned Clare, blushing a deep rose-colour.

"You seem to have become very intimate friends, then, all of a sudden," returned the old lady, looking kindly on the conscious face.

"Do you think so, dear auntie? I can't help it. There is no one else to speak to," she added, with increasing confusion.

"Do you really *wish* to help it?" asked Mrs. Montague, earnestly considering the girl's countenance.

Clare sat silent for a few moments, then said very softly,

“Perhaps I *ought*, dear auntie.”

“But you *do not*, my darling—is that it?”

“Oh! auntie, please don’t ask me. I hardly know what to say, or what I ought to say. Indeed—indeed there is nothing to talk about; and if you think I am doing wrong, I had better, perhaps, go home at once.”

“Softly, my dear child. You are here in my care for the present, and I loved your father, and I love you still more, for you are like—my Lydia, and—and—her fate was a very hard one; but I do not want to talk about that just now, only I wish to save you from the same; and I cannot see what I do see and hold my peace. I am an old woman, but I have not forgotten what it was to be young, and when I loved a poor man myself.”

“Dear, dear auntie!” said Clare, going up to her old friend, and, kneeling down by her chair, took one of the withered hands which rested on the arm and kissed and caressed it;

for Clare felt much more at home with her old aunt than with her mother, and she continued, "Do not distress yourself in talking to me of your past troubles. You are very kind in taking so much interest in me; and if you think that I or any one else is wrong, tell me what is best to be done."

"No one is wrong that I know of, my darling. It is very clear that Fitzgerald Tempest worships the very ground you tread on; and I do not blame him for that."

"Oh! auntie," whispered poor Clare, hiding her glowing face on her aunt's lap, "but indeed—indeed he has never said so to me; and I am sure he would not, because he knows it would be wrong."

"Why would it be wrong, my dearest?" asked the old lady, caressing the beautiful hair that rested on her lap.

"Why? Oh! aunt, surely mamma would never let it be."

"Well, my dear, but in this case it is you, and not your mamma, who is to be consulted.

She would have every right to oppose an unworthy attachment on your part; but it does not strike me that we can look upon Mr. Tempest as unworthy of any girl's love."

"Oh! no, he could never be unworthy; but still I do not think mamma would look upon it—upon him—I mean—as——"

"As a fitting husband for her only daughter. Is that your view of the case, Clare?"

"I fear it would be mamma's, aunt," returned the poor girl in a sorrowful voice.

"And why?"

"Because he is a sailor, and he is poor, and his aunts are poor."

"Granted. But they are well born. I was a Lyndon, and I married a sailor, and he was poor and well born; but I never regretted it, or ceased to glory in him as my husband."

"Ah! dear auntie, but you were very rich, and had the power of choice. Now I—well, you know, I have nothing but what mamma chooses to give me; and I should not like to bring poverty on one I loved."

“Well, my dear, make yourself happy about that, and have no fears for the future. There, get up. I hear a step on the gravel!”

CHAPTER XVI.

IT was not, however, all love-making at Deepwell that happy Christmas-time. The young men had their seasonable sports and occupations; and then Clare and Winnie spent long pleasant mornings together, and improved their acquaintance till it ripened into intimacy. They were very dissimilar natures, but the diversity of character bound the two girls more closely together, whilst there was an underlying bond of tender interest in the feeling with which Clare regarded Winnie that fully atoned for any little deficiencies that might occasionally become apparent to the more highly educated and delicately-nurtured girl. On Winnie's side it was a species of adoration, almost

equal to that with which she regarded Walter himself, or to that which Fitz so lavishly bestowed upon the queen of his heart.

These frequent morning absences of the young men only served to increase the pleasure of the afternoon and evening meetings, when they so often found themselves together at the Park.

Mrs. Montague encouraged those happy little re-unions at her own house. She liked to see the two happy pairs of lovers; and though with one of them their attachment was still undeclared, it was not the less understood for all that.

And so the happy days and weeks flew on till January was half over; and both Clare and Fitz more dearly prized every succeeding day passed in each other's presence, knowing how soon their happy dream must come to an end. It happened one damp January morning that Mrs. Montague was returning from an early walk across the Park, when she was overtaken by Fitz Tempest, apparently on his road to the

house. She rather exclaimed on seeing him, as she had believed him to be going elsewhere that morning, saying—

“You quite startled me, Mr. Tempest! I thought you and your friend were going to meet the hounds on the other side of the country this morning?”

“Yes, we did talk of it,” said Fitz, as the old lady took his arm kindly, to help her, she said, over some rough ground. “And Walter is gone; but I have so few days left now, I could not help coming here. How can I thank you enough, dear Mrs. Montague, for all your kindness to me and Winnie, and making us so happy?”

“Well, I am glad to hear you say you have been happy; and I believe you. However, I fancy your pretty little sister’s happiness is quite independent of me and mine, as it ought to be; though I do believe she has a real regard for and proper appreciation of my Clare.”

“That she certainly has. But there is nothing singular in *that*,” said Fitz, with a deep sigh.

"Now, Mr. Tempest, I daresay you will think me a very forward and impertinent old woman when I tell you I think you are very like your sister in that respect—I mean plainly, you love Clare Lyndon."

"Oh! Mrs. Montague," returned Fitz, trembling all over, as the cherished secret of his heart was thus rudely proclaimed; and hardly knowing what answer to make to this eccentric old lady who had been so kind to him, even whilst she seemed fully aware of the extent of his presumption and folly. She kept silence, however, and seemed to expect his answer, retaining her hold of his arm, and walking gently on. Then Fitz, taking courage, said, much as poor Clare had before done, when arraigned before the same tribunal, "Indeed, I could not help it! You have seen it, and yet you are not angry with my presumption; and indeed you need not be, for I know how hopeless it all is; but any future wretchedness is worth the intense happiness I have enjoyed this last month. Oh! what a happy world

this might be under some circumstances ! ”

“ Yes ; and there might be more happiness in it if people would but speak a right word in the right season. For want of that one word, half the misery in the world arises ; and sometimes things get so hopelessly entangled and wrong, that they never can come right again—in this world at least. I have seen it so in my time. And so now I take the liberty of speaking to you, Mr. Tempest, and of asking you what your intentions are ? ”

“ My intentions ! Oh ! Mrs. Montague, what intentions can I have except to go away and be miserable ? ”

“ Not very lively ones, indeed, my poor boy,” said the old woman, kindly ; adding, “ But do you really think that is incumbent upon you ?—I mean to be so miserable—and perhaps to make others so too ? ”

“ *Others !* Oh ! is it possible that she, that Clare, could care enough about me to mind my going away ? ”

“ I do not know about that, because go away

you must, yes, and be absent for the next three years at least. But it strikes me that under some circumstances you need not be so very miserable whilst you are away."

"Not certainly if I knew she cared for me. But, at the same time, I feel assured, in spite of your kindness, dear Mrs. Montague, that she *could not* listen to me."

"Why?"

"Because Miss Lyndon's expectations are naturally high; and I am sure her mother would never consent to her becoming the wife of such a humble individual as myself."

Poor Fitz constrained himself to speak calmly, though every pulse was throbbing with excitement.

"You are rushing at conclusions somewhat rapidly, my young friend. Excuse me if I speak somewhat unceremoniously, but you appear very young to me, who have now reached the opposite extreme of life; and life no doubt looks very different to us both from our reversed positions. But there is this great difference

also, that I look back with something of certainty in my estimation of its varied phases ; whilst to you the unseen is vague, and, in many respects, illusory. You have no doubt formed your own ideas and opinions on many untried subjects, and are prepared to act upon those ideas."

"One can only act to the best of one's judgment, in default of that experience which time alone can give. But there are certain things which require neither time nor experience to tell us are right," said Fitz.

"Such as ?—for instance?" inquired the pertinacious old lady.

"Well, such as the present," replied Fitz, his voice trembling with emotion, and unconsciously stopping, as he continued, "In my own unhappy case, which you seem to have divined, and which I will not deny, when a man loves, adores, as I do, hopelessly, I know the right thing is for me to go away, and leave room for some one more favoured by fortune than I am to approach Miss Lyndon."

"My experience tells me, in spite of your

theory, that such a course would be neither for the happiness of yourself or Miss Lyndon."

"People have generally to sacrifice their happiness when they try to do right," replied Fitz, bitterly.

"Because they sometimes have a wrong notion of what is right," returned Mrs. Montague, shortly.

"Have I a wrong idea in this case?"

"Yes—that is, you have made a false estimation, and you proceed to act upon it."

"Surely not of the relative positions of Miss Lyndon of Lyndon Court, and poor Fitz Tempest of Her Majesty's ship Dreadnought—being only a lieutenant therein!"

"Well, I can only answer *I* was Miss Lyndon of Deepwell Park, and I married Captain Montague of some ship in the Royal Navy, of the time being—it was certainly not Queen Victoria's—and no one found fault with the step, and I never repented it."

"Ah, Mrs. Montague!" again exclaimed poor Fitz, in a perfect storm of agitation, in which

hope and fear contended for mastery, "you cannot think the cases are parallel?"

"Not at present, certainly, but I cannot see why they may not be eventually. I would not say so much to you, Mr. Tempest, if I did not know that you are a worthy man; I mean a good deal by that homely expression, so let it pass. I have myself only known you a short time, but you are, nevertheless, very well known to me through others. You do not suppose I would have said what I have to you, but for that persuasion? Clare is very dear to me; I should like to see her happy; but the chances are I may not live to do so. Still I should be thankful to know that, as far as human foresight goes, it was secured."

"Oh, that that precious task might be mine, to watch over and contribute by my never-ceasing devotion to promote that happiness!" exclaimed Fitz, passionately.

"Yes, believe me; true love is better than riches, though I am no advocate for poverty."

"Ah! there it is," said Fitz, sorrowfully; "I

am poor, and my profession is not one to get rich in. Yet I have every hope of rising in it, and then—then—when I have anything to offer, to lay it all at Clare Lyndon's feet! I feel as if there were no impossibilities I could not accomplish with such a blessed hope before me!"

They walked on in silence for some little time, both the old woman and the young man deeply absorbed in their own contemplations. At last they came close upon the fine old house, standing in its stately grandeur, encircled on all sides by its deep hills of evergreen plantation, which stood, courtier-like, at a respectful distance, guarding it from every adverse blast, and adding to the picturesque beauty of the picture.

Mrs. Montague paused for a moment before she ascended the broad terrace steps which led to the front entrance, and withdrawing her hand from her companion's arm, pointed in the direction of the house, and asked,

"What do you think of the old place? I am

necessarily partial to its appearance without, as well as its comforts within."

"There can be no difference of opinion on *that* point," returned Fitz, lightly; adding, with a smile, "I have had sufficient experience of its hospitality within, to enable me to say it is impossible to find a more delightful as well as beautiful place in any part of the habitable world."

"I am glad you think so," replied Mrs. Montague, "for it will be Clare Lyndon's—that is, if she marries to please me."

A deep blush rose to the young man's very brow; and then he said, in a low, hesitating voice,

"I had no idea of this! It places Miss Lyndon far more out of my reach than I had even before imagined!"

The old lady smiled, as she said,

"Give me your arm up these steps to the terrace—there! now we have surmounted the difficulty. Why do you persist in making mountains out of mole-hills? I suppose I may

dispose of my own property as I will. If Clare disobey me in any way, I shall endow the old place as a hospital for disabled seamen of the better class, or make it a school for the necessitous daughters of naval men. So you see my regard for your profession is not a thing of to-day." Then, as they slowly paced the terrace, Mrs. Montague added, in a graver tone, "I have told you this, Mr. Tempest, that you may be assured my Clare will run no risk of encountering the hardships of poverty if she makes a choice I approve of. At the same time, I have no desire that she should enter into any irrevocable engagement at present. If you love her as you say, you have my leave to tell her so—that is, before you go; but I may trust in your honour not to bind her by any promise either definite or implied; leave her free as air, and do you consider yourself also as free. When you return in the course of the next three years, you will both have ascertained your own minds. Yes, I know what you would say, and I believe you, that you do love my Clare with that depth

and sincerity which will bear the test I propose; at the same time, she, knowing your feelings, will be at liberty to act as seems best for her own happiness. When you return she will be three and twenty, and her own mistress to decide upon her future fate. I have talked a great deal to you this morning, Mr. Tempest, but I know you will forgive an old woman who still feels the liveliest interest in the future of those she loves."

For all reply Fitz took the hand that rested on his arm and lifted it to his lips as reverently as if it had belonged to his patron saint; he had no words to tell the deep overpowering gratitude with which his heart was glowing. As they entered the house together, Fitz only said,

"I can never thank you as I feel, or express my deep sense of your goodness to me; I can only assure you your generous confidence shall never be misplaced. Whatever may come to pass hereafter, whether happy or miserable, I will only seek at any sacrifice to promote the

happiness of her for whose dear sake you have shown me so much kindness."

"I believe you," was the reply ; then crossing the hall to her own morning sitting-room, she looked round and said to Fitz, "I think I hear the piano in the drawing-room ; I daresay you will find Clare there," and the two went their separate ways.

When Mrs. Montague next saw Clare she was sitting alone. Fitz Tempest was gone, but there was a deep tender light in her sweet eyes, and a soft glow on her delicate cheek, which told of words heard for the first time in her innocent girlish life—but heard with that feeling which would cause the memory of them to last whilst life lasted. And yet the words that had passed between them had been very simple words. No vows had been taken, no promises either given or required. Clare Lyndon and Fitz Tempest had talked some time together, chiefly of his approaching departure and her return home. When the words came trembling forth, that were to alter the whole aspect of life here-

after for both. Fitz had only said, in a trembling voice, and in disjointed sentences.

“Before I leave you, Clare—may I call you Clare just once?—I must open my whole heart to you, I must tell you in words what you must have guessed, have felt, that I love you, and did so, though I hardly knew it, from the first moment my eyes rested on your sweet face, pale with terror, and yet so calm and brave, whilst refusing to leave your brother. Oh Clare! you have been my whole thought, day and night, since that moment, and my entire heart is full of you. I would die to give you a moment’s ease or pleasure. It is no vain boast, for my whole life is wrapt up in yours. And now I am going away for years, and you, my beautiful love, will be seen and loved by every one that comes near you. I only ask you not to forget the absent one who loves you with a love deeper than words can express, or thought imagine.”

He had taken Clare’s little soft hand in his own weather-beaten palm; and there it flutter-

ed and trembled, but did not seek its release, and she only answered,

“I shall never forget you, Fitz Tempest.”

“May heaven bless you for that one word of comfort! I ask for no more, my darling, but leave to think of you till I come back. I may come and see you then, Clare?”

“I hope you may,” was all Clare’s answer, given in a sorrowful tone; for thoughts of what Lady Lyndon might have to say came across her thoughts, blotting out her happiness with a dark foreboding. Still to her pure, trusting heart the knowledge that Fitz loved her, and would continue to do so, was enough to restore her composure, whilst her confidence in her lover’s faith was all unbounded. Fitz did not reveal what had passed between him and their kind old friend; it served as his stay and comfort when thinking of the future, and he left it to Mrs. Montague to impart as much or as little as she chose, at her own discretion. No doubt, enough was intimated to Clare to lighten her heart and ease her conscience in picturing to

herself her future life, and the one idea she knew her mother entertained in regard to it, that she should marry for wealth and high position. A few days after that Fitz took his leave; he had no more private interviews with Clare, nor, under the circumstances, did he seek one. He was already made happy in the knowledge that she in some degree returned his affection. Soon after Fitz's departure Clare, too, received her summons to return home.

CHAPTER XVII.

IT has already been mentioned that, during Mr. Hampden's short Christmas visit to his mother, she found various ways of making him useful; and as he showed great docility, she sometimes sent him out to pay visits for her in that inclement season. The Dowager herself never ventured out at that time of year, and Lady Jane eschewed visiting also, having some slight peculiarities about wrapping up, and sitting in hot rooms, and catching cold. So it happened that the Grove ladies were never very sociable about Christmas time. The Dowager did not keep horses, though she retained her carriage, but it was rarely brought out in the depth of winter. Lady Fullerton thought it,

therefore, a good use to make of her casual guest, to go round and call on all her neighbours. It embraced many advantages, it atoned for any deficiencies on the part of herself and daughter; it occupied the reverend gentleman's time, leaving him less in which to lament over his pecuniary difficulties, and giving him new topics to think over and discuss with his mother, on his return from these compulsory visitations. Poor Mr. Hampden was in that state of meek and plaintive submission, as well as domestic despondency, that he was ready to do anything his mother might require; and indeed not sorry to have some occupation found for him at the Grove, that carried him out of himself and its precincts at the same time. Lady Fullerton especially desired her son to call, for her, on Lady Lyndon at the Court. He had already heard from his old acquaintances, the Miss Tempests, that Lady Lyndon was at home. He had also been duly informed of, what he knew before, the impending marriages in their respective families. He felt it was certainly all-

incumbent on him to call at Lyndon Court on his own account as well as his mother's ; for he, as Lady Audrey's uncle,—though a *step* removed,—might be supposed to have a near interest in the event, and he also wished to make Lady Lyndon's acquaintance, being curious as to the truth of the report which proclaimed her beauty to be still remarkable. She and the Dowager had already exchanged civil notes of mutual congratulation on the occasion, but neither of the ladies had met since the engagement had been announced.

“ You say Lady Lyndon is alone ? Neither son nor daughter at home ? ” asked Mr. Hampden, as he gave a finishing brush to his hat, and drew on a pair of immaculate grey gloves.

“ Yes, in her note she mentioned that Sir Vere was still at the Castle, and her daughter at Mrs. Montague's, where she would remain till her brother brought her back on his way home, the middle of the month, or it might be the end—so you will find no one at the Court but the lady herself ; and I do not think she

much affects visitors ; in fact, I imagine she has led a very retired life during Sir Montague's time—that is, as regards English society ; but she will get on well now with our connexion.”

“ Yes, it is a capital match on both sides. I have never seen Lady Lyndon, and shall be glad to make her acquaintance. I have asked Edith a good deal about her, and all of them, but she never seems to notice much about people in general. Now Florence is quite different. She can tell you everything people look like, and what they wear, whom they seem to like, and be liked by, and a thousand other little things which quite escape Edith's observation,” said Mr. Hampden, in his most plaintive tone.

Lady Jane smiled quietly to herself, but said nothing, whilst the Dowager remarked,

“ Yes, I have seen that in Edith myself. She is very like Jane in that respect. They have neither of them any talent for observing small things.”

Whether Lady Fullerton meant this in praise or blame, no one knew, still less ventured to

inquire, and shortly after her son set off on his walk to Lyndon Court. Arrived there, he duly rang the bell, and inquired whether Lady Lyndon was within. The man who came to the door, and was a rather pompous specimen of his class, looked Mr. Hampden over from head to foot, seeing he was a stranger, and had walked. Still there was the unmistakable air of a gentleman about the clergyman, that caused the man to inquire,

“Please, sir, what name?”

At the magic one of Hampden, back flew both the folding-doors, and the butler, turning to the footman, who stood a few paces within, desired him to step into the garden and tell her ladyship that Mr. Hampden had called.

Upon this gracious reception, Mr. Hampden presented his card, asking the footman to deliver it to his lady; and then followed his first friend to the morning-room, usually inhabited by Lady Lyndon. The room appeared quite empty as he entered, and he walked up to the fireplace, and stood there warming his hands,

and glancing up at a large picture which hung just over his head. It was a full-length portrait of the late Sir Montague, taken when he was a boy, with a large Newfoundland dog by his side. The portrait was a very good one, both of the animal and the child. Whilst he gazed absently at the picture, waiting for the lady of the house to appear, he heard a slight rustle at the further side of the room, and turning his eyes in that direction, he saw a young girl crouching on a soft white rug, by the side of an easy chair, on which lay a large book, with which she was apparently engaged, though it was evident her attention was distracted by the new arrival, as her head was turned every now and then in the direction of the fireplace where he stood.

“I beg your pardon. I did not see you,” said Mr. Hampden, courteously, on recognizing the presence of the girl, and going towards her. She then altered her position, and rose from the floor, awaiting his approach. “I do not know whether I am addressing Miss Lyndon?” said

the clergyman, who had never seen Clare, and had very vague ideas both as to her age and general appearance.

“Oh ! no, I am not Miss Clare. She is much older than I am, and we are not in the least alike, though I have only seen her once out walking, but I know we must be very different,” said the girl in reply, without the least confusion or hesitation.

She might well say they were very different, for there could not be a stronger contrast than between the two girls. The one who now stood before Mr. Hampden was hardly more than a child, and yet she looked older than she was, being but thirteen ; and her manner also was by no means childlike, though it was quite unformed, whilst her tone and manner of speaking, without being in the least vulgar, yet bespoke want of cultivation of the highest kind. As regarded her personal appearance, the girl was tall and slender, with a promise of great beauty both in figure and face. The latter was dark, with fine eyes and regular features, and

an abundance of rich deep brown hair. Mr. Hampden noted everything he saw, and his curiosity prompted him to remark further (though by no means believing in what he said),

“Then perhaps I am speaking to one of my own young nieces, whom I have not seen for so long; and young ladies grow up and alter so quickly, that I must be forgiven if I have forgotten one of the Lady Hampdens?”

The girl opened her large, dark-brown eyes, and looked quickly in the clergyman's face, to see if he was in earnest, or only making a jest of her; but being re-assured by his steady look of calm inquiry, she suddenly burst out laughing, displaying a row of the finest and whitest teeth he had ever seen as she answered—

“How funny to take *me* for one of the young ladies at the Castle!—but I know them all, and have been there, and I know Miss Ainslie too. She is very nice for a governess—don't you think so?”

Mr. Hampden was beginning a hesitating

reply to his young interrogator, when the door opened quickly, and Lady Lyndon made her appearance, saying—

“I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Hampden, but I am very glad to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance.” Then, turning a searching glance upon the girl, who kept her ground unmoved, she said—“Take your book into the ante-room, if you wish to read, Nora ; but I think you had better go out and walk about in the grounds a little. I was just going to send for you when this card was brought me.”

“Very well,” said the girl, looking, however, as if she thought it was anything but “well ;” and then adding—“But I can wait for you, Lady Lyndon, here, if I may go out with you afterwards. I don’t want to read any more.”

“Go now, my dear,” was all the answer, in a tone of quiet command that was instantly obeyed, though apparently without much satisfaction.

After a few civil speeches, Mr. Hampden re-

turned to the subject of his late companion, hoping to be enlightened as to her name and position, repeating, for Lady Lyndon's edification, the words he had addressed to the girl, and adding—

“I do not know whether the young lady belongs to this neighbourhood or to my brother's. She is, I daresay, some one I *ought* to know or remember, though grown quite out of my recollection, for she spoke of being at the Castle, and knowing my nieces there.”

Lady Lyndon looked annoyed for a moment, then answered, in a tone of quiet decision—

“No, my young friend is not anyone you are likely to have known or seen at any time before the present, Mr. Hampden. She is a good little girl, in whom I take an interest, and whose future career I hope to find some means of benefiting.”

Then was the clergyman satisfied, as he said to himself—“Ah! I see—some object of charity. I have heard how very indiscriminate this lady is in her givings and doings. So she has taken

up this girl, no doubt, on account of her pretty face—picked her up, perhaps, during her stay at the Castle. Well, much good may it do her!” Not a word of these thoughts, however, was uttered aloud; he only looked grateful and gratified by the explanation, such as it was, and just murmured—

“Ah! very kind indeed.” And then they talked quite pleasantly and sociably of late events, and the marriage, in which they had a common interest, whilst the lady studied the gentleman, and wondered whether he really felt any of the interest he expressed in his niece, the Lady Audrey, and whether he was likely to come there at all times and seasons after she was married to her son, and had taken up her abode at the Court.

The interview lasted some time, and the parting was very friendly—quite cordial, considering how very undemonstrative both the parties were. But Mr. Hampden thought what a nice place this charming old Court would be to take his daughter Florence to stay at, with

her cousin, Lady Audrey Lyndon; and the distance was so easy, that even his "Georgie" might go there for a little change occasionally, whilst Edith would stay at home with him to look after the children and the parish. Well, after all, poor man, it was not himself he thought of.

The Dowager was much gratified in listening to all the details of this visit on her son's return, and quite merry over the account of the young girl staying with the Lady of Lyndon, saying,

"I have not the least doubt that the girl has been taken out of some gipsy horde by Lady Lyndon. You say she is so dark and so handsome, with rather uncultivated manners, and yet some native grace withal. Well, she does some very absurd things, I am told, in the charitable line; so I am not surprised at any thing I hear. But I do not think, if she brings such young ladies to the Court as her familiar companions, that my Lady Audrey will much approve of the association."

“Possibly the girl, whoever she may be, will be gone before her ladyship’s arrival,” suggested the Rev. Augustus.

And so it proved. The dark young beauty was only a passing guest, for, long before even Clare’s return, she was gone from the Court. There was something said or understood, from some quarter or another, that the girl was gone to school; and it also transpired that when she went away Lady Lyndon went too. It was probably Mrs. Welby who made the communication, although she had never seen the young stranger at the Court nearer than at church, on the two or three Sundays she was with Lady Lyndon.

However, she received an intimation one day from that lady, during a morning call, that she was about going to London, saying she had much business to transact with her lawyer there, previous to her son’s marriage; and she had also other business to do, in looking out a proper school for a young friend of hers, during the time she was in town. That communica-

tion produced from Mrs. Welby the half inquiry,

“For the young lady who, I see, is staying with you at present?”

Lady Lyndon merely inclined her head in reply, and then went on to speak of the probable duration of her stay, and of things to be done in her absence regarding her many *protégées* in the parish.

Certainly the poor in that locale had never been so well cared for, as to creature comforts, as during the abode of the present Lady of Lyndon. She was almost munificent in the distribution of her alms; her charity (of *that* description) might have covered a multitude of sins, it was so extensive. Still, though Lady Lyndon conferred constantly both with Mr. and Mrs. Welby on the subject of what she was doing, and intended to do, in the parish, there was no increase of confidence or intimacy between the Court and the Rectory. The lady at the former place never asked or took advice; she went entirely on her own judgment, and

that sometimes differed a little from the clergyman's. Not that there was the slightest show of opposition to anything that emanated from him or his wife in any way.

One day Mrs. Welby complained to her husband, after Lady Lyndon's farewell Christmas visit.

"I really do not see, James, that after all we are much better off for neighbours at the Court than we were when it stood empty."

"If *we* are not, my dear, at all events all our poorer neighbours are, and that is a good deal more to the purpose. Not that I see we have anything to complain of in Lady Lyndon."

"No, dear, I don't complain, I hope. But she is a tiresome woman! There, I have said it, and I can't help it. She never comes a bit nearer to you, and you never seem to know a word more of what is in her real mind than the first day she came as a stranger. The fact is, James, Lady Lyndon never answers a question to the point. She appears to think you want to know much more than you do—just as if she

were afraid of committing herself if she gave a straightforward answer."

"It is her way, my dear—her way—she cannot help it. I know what you mean; I think it proceeds from excess of *caution* in her character. There is no harm in it, if it does not make her too mistrustful of others. I believe her to be a good woman under it all. Never mind, Patience, we shall soon have the young people coming home, and I hope we shall grow to know more of them. I like what I have seen of that young man; and as to his sister—I think we are both agreed on that point."

"Yes; there is no doubt she is a very sweet, loveable girl; but she is so terribly kept back by her mother, I never expect to see much of her here, for Miss Lyndon will never come running in and out like my pet Winnie. How we shall miss her!—at least I am sure *I* shall."

"Well, we must have no selfish regrets on that point. I really know of nothing that has given me more satisfaction than to hear of this nice marriage dear little Winnie Tempest is

about to make, though it will of course take her away from us. She will, I daresay, often come amongst her old friends, especially as Mr. Walter Bingham is a nephew, and a favourite one, of our good neighbour, Mr. Denbigh."

"Yes, no doubt; but Mrs. Walter Bingham will not be the same as Winnie Tempest."

"If I know anything of character, I do not think Winnie is ever likely to alter to her old friends."

"No more do I, husband; and if I said anything like it, I beg to recant. Now let us go and see the aunts, and hear when she is expected home."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Lady Lyndon came back from London, she brought her daughter with her; having made the same little *détour* to the station nearest Deepwell Park, and there she was joined by Clare. It was understood in the neighbourhood that Sir Vere was still at Hampden Castle, and likely to remain till he accompanied his friends there to his own (or rather his mother's) place, on their way to London, at the end of January or the beginning of February—a time that was not very far distant then.

Clare and her mother had but little time for confidential communications, as Lady Lyndon's whole attention then appeared to be engrossed in the preparation of a suite of rooms she destined for her son and his bride when they

came to live at the Court. During her stay in London she had chosen new furniture of a very costly description, and the workmen were engaged to come down and put everything throughout these apartments in the most complete order. It was therefore of carpets and curtains, and various other homely topics, that the lady of the place discoursed incessantly on her return home. There were also pictures to be selected from the overflowing abundance of which the house boasted, some of which Lady Lyndon knew to be particularly prized by her son. All these were to be removed to his new rooms, and placed in the most advantageous light; whilst other furniture had to be altered and freshly arranged in consequence.

Clare found her mother's whole attention bent on these matters. How could she place her own heart affairs in a sufficiently interesting position to compete with such objects? Clare in truth received but little encouragement to open her heart to her mother. Neither did Lady Lyndon appear to care to hear anything

about her old aunt, or what had passed during her visit at Deepwell. A few cursory observations and inquiries were very soon disposed of the day of their first meeting, and then Lady Lyndon returned to the all-absorbing topic of Sir Vere and Lady Audrey's future apartments. One day, after a slight pause, Clare asked her mother—

“You remember the house called the Firs, don't you, mamma? I told you in my letter that Admiral and Mrs. Bingham are just come to live there.”

“Yes, I remember all about it, Clare. Mrs. Bingham, I know, is a sister of Mr. Denbigh's, and a nice person, I believe, though I never saw her. Well, it will be a great advantage to old Mrs. Montague, if she cares to profit by their near neighbourhood. It will tend to civilize her a little.”

“Oh! mamma, dear Auntie Montague is as civilized as any of us, I am sure, and she is only eccentric in being kinder and better than other people.”

Clare spoke more warmly than usual, with a lively sense and recollection of her old friend's peculiar interposition of kindness on her own and Fitz's behalf. Lady Lyndon made no reply for a minute, but glanced furtively at her daughter's heightened colour, then said very calmly,

"That may be *your* opinion, Clare, but it by no means agrees with my own experience."

"Oh! mamma"—then she checked herself in her further vindication of her old friend's kindness to the world in general, and remembering that her mother might not have received as much as herself, she changed her intended eulogy into another inquiry, asking,

"You know Winnie is going to marry Mr. Walter Bingham?"

"Winnie?—Winnie?—pray who may Winnie be?" inquired the mother in her turn.

"Surely, mamma, you must have heard of Miss Tempest's intended marriage?"

"Yes, I think Mrs. Welby spoke of it; but it was no concern of mine. And when you talked

of Winnie, I had really for a moment forgotten the important circumstance, though I remember now you mentioned something about some intended bride staying at Admiral Bingham's."

Clare felt her face flush—more at the tone in which her mother spoke (though it was only one of calm indifference) than at the mention of the one loved name.

Clare had never as yet spoken of her love to anyone. Between her and her friend Winnie no word had ever been exchanged, though Winnie felt as much assured of its existence as if the fact had been confided to her. Old Mrs. Montague had surprised the girl's secret, but no more. All that had ever passed on the subject was in that brief interview between herself and Fitz; and now, as she thought it all over, in the silence and solitude of her own home, it seemed almost to Clare like a dream. It was indeed silence and solitude in regard to that one cherished subject. Her mother would have talked to her on any other, apparently, but as soon as the name of Tempest was mentioned, Lady Lyndon shut

herself up in an impenetrable fortress of indifference and reserve.

Clare knew that Fitz had sailed almost immediately after he had left the Binghams, for she saw the announcement in the paper the very day following her return home. She had read the well-known name of his ship, and her eyes had grown dim with unshed tears as she looked, and a choking sensation in her throat almost suffocated her. But her mother, coming soon after into the room, observed none of these things. She held patterns of rich silks in her hand, and began immediately to talk of hangings, and curtains, and such subjects of deep interest; so how could poor Clare point to the little paragraph which told of her lover's departure, and say she could think of nothing else that day? Clare longed to hear from, or of, Winnie. She had remained with the Binghams after Fitz's departure. It was a very heart-breaking affair to poor Winnie, so Fitz was desirous that she might remain there, with Walter to console her as far as he could. Mrs. Bing-

ham promised to take Winnie home herself. Her husband and son had business in London, and she proposed making a visit to her brother at Nether Hall at the same time.

With all these little arrangements Clare was perfectly conversant, and they appeared to her of far more interest and importance than any of the works of preparation which at that time so deeply engrossed her mother. And she spent many an hour in speculating whether Winnie had arrived at the Cabin, and when she should see her or Mrs. Bingham. To her great sorrow and mortification she had found the cards of the elder Miss Tempests, a few days after her return, and almost wondered to herself at the strange agitation which the sight of those elderly spinsters' names occasioned her. But she knew that nearly Fitz's last day in England had been spent with them, for he had gone down to refresh them with a last sight of his beloved face before he went away for so long a time. What would not poor Clare have given had it been permitted to her to walk down by her-

self to the Cabin, and enjoy a quiet hour's chat with Fitz's aunts. As it was, Lady Lyndon took the cards out of Clare's hands, saying,

"I saw those tiresome old ladies coming, so sent word I was particularly engaged—and so I was. We have had an escape!"

Clare was on the point of saying, "I do not think so. I should have been glad to see Winnie's aunts, and hear when she is coming home," but the words died away on her lips, and never passed beyond them.

In due time Lady Lyndon received the welcome tidings that she might expect her future daughter-in-law, with others of her family, as well as her own son, on the last day of the month. There was also another note, which arrived about the same time. It said very briefly:—

"DEAR LADY LYNDON,—Have I your permission to join the party on the 31st? I only propose remaining a couple of days, and am also on my road to town.

"Yours faithfully,

"TUDOR."

To this the Lady of Lyndon replied as briefly:—

“DEAR LORD TUDOR,—It will give me particular pleasure to see you here with Lady Fullerton’s party on the 31st.

“Yours truly,

“A. LYNDON.”

A day or two before they arrived another less welcome visitor made her appearance at the Court. This was no other than Winnie Tempest, who took advantage of Mr. Welby’s having an appointment with Lady Lyndon, as Winnie found to be the case when she ran over to the Rectory the day after her return home. She declared it would be the very opportunity for her to go and see Clare comfortably, as her mother would be fully occupied with the Rector. So she insisted on accompanying the good man, and he saw no just reason for denying her request. Winnie had certainly learnt to take her own way a little more decidedly since her engagement, and even to venture into the pres-

ence of Lady Lyndon without any misgivings as to her reception.

Thus it was that Clare, sitting quietly at work whilst her mother was busily engaged in writing, found herself suddenly imprisoned in Winnie's encircling arms, and a shower of kisses falling on her face. Lady Lyndon looked up quietly surprised, whilst she greeted Mr. Welby rather coldly, and extended her hand ceremoniously to his companion, as soon as Winnie was at liberty to receive it.

"Oh, my darling Clare!—what delight to see you again! I only came late last night with dear Mrs. Bingham; and Walter and the Admiral are gone on to London to settle things—and then everything will be finally fixed—and oh, dear Clare! I am come on purpose to ask you to be one of my bridesmaids! You half promised, darling, when we were at that dear happy place, Deepwell, together, so now I have come to claim your promise."

"I should like it of all things, dearest Winnie," returned Clare, in her low, gentle voice,

that contrasted strikingly with Winnie's tones, raised in their excited eagerness rather beyond their most becoming pitch. What more she would have added is uncertain, as Lady Lyndon's quick ear caught Winnie's speech even whilst listening to Mr. Welby's discourse, and she answered with cold politeness, continuing Clare's answer,—

“But I fear it is quite out of the question, Miss Tempest. My daughter has never yet appeared in the capacity of bridesmaid to *any* of her friends, nor do I particularly wish her to do so, though I have waived my objections in the case of the marriage which will soon take place in her own immediate family circle, and to attend which we shall before long be going to town.”

“Oh, how unlucky!” returned poor Winnie, taking the refusal literally as arising from an impossibility, and not on account of want of kind feeling or civility towards herself, continuing, “What a disappointment! I had so reckoned upon you; and to think that you will

be away at the time in London ! and I am to be married from the dear old Cabin—aunts would have it so ; they do not mind the trouble or inconvenience, they are so kind. Mrs. Bingham would have had it from the Firs, but Aunt Arethusa said it was Walter's place to come and fetch me, and not mine to go and claim him ; and Aunt Pen said she thought so too, and dear kind Mrs. Bingham laughed and said they were quite right ; so, darling, it is all settled, and as soon as my things are all finished, the wedding is to take place. And, oh, it won't be half a wedding without you, Clare !”

“Indeed, Winnie, I wish I could come to you ; but, as mamma says, we shall be in London to attend Vere and Audrey's.”

At that time, Lady Lyndon, after her rebuff to Winnie, had got rather deep into village politics with the Rector, so the two girls chatted on without fear of disturbance ; and then Clare heard from Winnie what she was longing to know, and she told her that Fitz had had an

opportunity of sending a short letter after they had sailed, and that, so far, all was well with him.

“But three years is a terrible time—is it not, Clare?—particularly when so many things are going to happen; and then not to have him either to give me away!—but Mr. Denbigh is to do that. So aunts are both quite satisfied; but do you know, Clare,” said Winnie, lowering her voice, “I had much rather it had been dear Mr. Welby—only he is to marry us, so I suppose he could not do both; but really I don’t half care for my wedding without you and Fitz.”

There was something in that little remark that brought the ready tears into Clare’s eyes.

Fitz was quite gone, and she was unable to show the least kindness or attention to the little sister he loved so dearly!—Well, as she often thought, “it could not be helped,” so she consoled herself in thinking that Winnie would be too happy and too fully occupied to have any time to miss her; and as for the other, why, Fitz had often left Winnie before, so she would

soon get used to his absence, as she had been obliged to do in former days. And with something to that effect, Clare replied to Winnie's last remark, but she shook her head, saying,

"Yes, I daresay you think I must care less about poor Fitz, because I am going to be so happy myself; but indeed, darling, now that I really know and have felt what happiness and misery means by experience, I care ten thousand times more for Fitz and for—for everyone I love, like you, dear," said Winnie, rather timidly, for she felt afraid of venturing on the least allusion to the state of feeling she suspected to exist between her brother and Clare. At that moment Mr. Welby rose, and looking towards his companion, said,

"Now, if you are ready to go, Winnie, I am; and if you are not, I can leave you here, and you can, I know, find your way back to the Rectory to luncheon; and after that I suppose you will be expected at home."

Clare was about to exclaim, "Oh! do stay a little longer, Winnie!" but a glance at her

mother's stony face prevented her; and Winnie, feeling somehow she was not wanted, rose, saying with ready good-nature,

"Oh! as you have kindly brought me, I will not leave you to go back alone; and I want to talk a little more to dear Mrs. Welby, so I am coming with you."

Then the two girls kissed each other, and Lady Lyndon allowed Winnie to shake the tips of her fingers; and then Winnie took her departure with the Rector. As soon as the door had closed upon the two, Lady Lyndon addressed her daughter, saying,

"I think that was rather a cool request of Miss Tempest to make."

"What request?" asked Clare, absently.

"For you to act as her bridesmaid, when she has so slight an acquaintance with you; though no one would suppose it, from her very forward and unpleasant way of greeting you."

"Winnie and I have seen a great deal of each other, mamma, during the time we were such near neighbours at Deepwell. Mrs. Mon-

tague liked her to come very often ; and we all found it pleasant being together," replied Clare, with quiet resolution in her tone.

Lady Lyndon slightly elevated her shoulders, and answered,

"I can only wonder, then, at Mrs. Montague's choice of a companion for you, as well as your own pleasure in such mindless society."

"Mamma," said Clare, looking as if she had nerved herself to some great trial, "I think I ought to tell you that Winnie is not the foolish girl you suppose her to be. The Binghams, who know her well, all love her ; and—and you know her brother is the dearest friend in the world that Walter Bingham has."

"Very likely," replied Lady Lyndon. "But what is that to us, or rather to me ? I have my own opinion, and the friendship of indifferent people will not alter it."

"But it is something to *me*, mamma ; and it is something of such great importance to me, that I hope, mamma, dear, you will think it worth listening to."

"What do you mean, Clare?" asked her mother, rather pettishly.

"Only I wish to tell you, mamma, that—that Mr. Tempest—Fitz—Winnie's brother, you know, has told me he loves me."

And then poor Clare's heart beat so rapidly, she could not articulate another word. Lady Lyndon's studied composure seemed for one minute about to desert her, her colour changed rapidly, she looked intensely astonished and half alarmed; then, calming herself with a violent effort, she said,

"You mean to say this man, this Mr. Tempest, has made you an offer? And pray, may I ask, the nature of your reply?"

"Oh! dearest mamma, do not be angry, he did not make me an offer—he only told me he loved me. I do not think he wished in any way to bind me by an answer; and just before going away for such a long, long time, I only told him—as far as I can remember my words—that I should not forget him—it was all he asked in return."

Poor Clare, having made her confession at last, sat still, trembling, distressed, and yet relieved that she had taken courage to speak to her mother. Lady Lyndon looked considerably relieved as her daughter explained the exact state of things between her and Fitz Tempest. The confession took her extremely by surprise, for her mind had been so occupied with other things, that she had never thought for a moment of any danger arising from Clare's companionship with the Tempest family, beyond that of a foolish girlish intimacy springing up between her and Winnie, whom she disliked for more reasons than one. Remembering, however, how opposition is said to increase any dawning fancy, she checked the inclination to speak bitterly and disparagingly of this penniless young sailor, who had dared to address words of love to her beautiful and richly-endowed daughter. She therefore only said, after a pause,

"I think Mr. Tempest would have shown better taste if he had refrained from addressing

any love speeches to you, Clare; but I believe gentlemen of his profession are apt to be rather lavish of such declarations, and he is possibly no exception to the rule; and by his not seeking any answer, he showed he required none. No doubt he admired you, Clare. You will find a great many men besides him to do the same; and it seems you put him off with as civil a speech as you could, not to hurt his feelings. It was kindly intended of you, Clare; but you must not be too kind and considerate on such occasions. He must have known it was presumption in him to talk in that way to you; but as he has departed on a long cruise, as I hope, he will no doubt soon forget all about it; so, if you please, Clare, we will drop the subject; though I am glad you mentioned it." Then the lady kissed her daughter, and said no more about Fitz.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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